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On 32 yrs of Babri, security beefed up in UP

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Mkt snap 5-day bull run as RBI cuts FY25 forecast

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Mitchell's 6-wicket haul helps Australia dominate

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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RBI hikes FY25 inflation to 4.8%, cuts GDP by 0.6%

RBI keeps repo rates unchanged, cuts CRR as economy slows

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday raised the inflation projection for current fiscal year to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent with Governor Shaktikanta Das saying lingering food price pressures are likely to keep headline inflation elevated in the December quarter.

RBI kept its key interest rate unchanged but cut the cash reserve ratio that banks are required to park with the central bank, as it did a balancing act between inflation management and supporting economic growth.

It also cut the GDP growth projection to 6.6 per cent for current financial year, from an earlier forecast of 7.2 per cent.

With India's GDP seeing a sharper-than-anticipated dip in the July-September period to 5.4 per cent -- its slowest pace in seven quarters, inflation on the uptick and rupee under pressure, the RBI had few choices to make.

Its monetary policy committee, which consists of three RBI and an equal number of external members, kept the repurchase or repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for a record 11th meeting in a row.

Four of the six members of the panel voted for a status quo in rate, while retaining its policy stance at "neutral".

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the Cash Reserve Ratio -- the proportion of deposits that banks must set aside with the central bank -- has been cut by 50 basis points to 4 per cent, effective in two tranches on 14 December and 28 December.

The cut will infuse Rs 1.16 lakh crore into the banking system and will soften short-term interest rates and enhance capacity of banks to extend credit and invigorates economic activity across sectors.

Das, in his last monetary policy before his second three-year term as Governor ends on 10 December unless it is extended by the government, shunned calls from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal for lowering borrowing costs. —*PTI*

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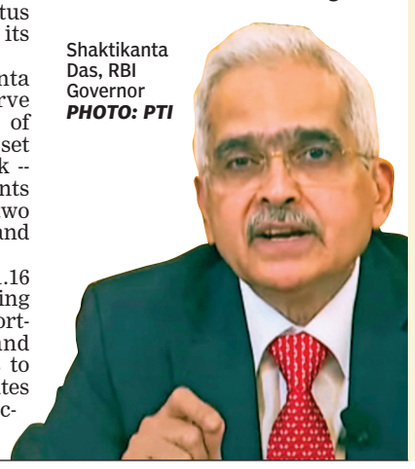

Shaktikanta Das, RBI Governor ***PHOTO: PTI***

No plans to de-dollarise, claims Das

Mumbai, 6 Dec

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday said India does not have any plans to 'de-dollarise' its trade and is only looking at derisking it by other means. He was responding to a question on US President-elect Donald Trump's threat that BRICS countries will face 100 per cent tariffs if they choose to move away from the US dollar. —*PTI*

MANY INJURED

Farmers stop Delhi march as cops use tear gas, force

SHAMBHU, 6 DEC

Farmers protesting for various demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP), suspended their foot march to Delhi on Friday due to clashes with police that left several injured.

A group of 101 farmers commenced their march from the Shambhu border but were met with multilayered barricades set up by Haryana security personnel just metres from their starting point. As the protesters approached the barricades, security forces fired multiple tear gas shells to disperse the crowd, prompting many farmers to cover their eyes and mouths and attempt to shield themselves with wet jute bags.

Despite initial progress in pushing through an outer barricade, the march was ultimately halted. Protesters reportedly attempted to dismantle iron fencing and were seen challenging the security presence. In response to the escalating situation, water cannon vehicles were deployed, and the Haryana Police cited a prohibitory order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which forbids gatherings of five or more people.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher revealed that five to six farmers sustained injuries due to the tear gas. He announced the suspension of the march for the day, stating that the injured had been taken to hospital. Following this setback, the protesting groups will determine their next steps in a meeting soon.

In light of the protests, the Haryana government suspended mobile internet and bulk SMS services in 11 villages until 9 December and ordered the closure of local schools.

The farmers have been camped at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points since 13 February, also demanding a farm debt waiver, pensions for farmers and labourers, and justice for victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence. —*PTI*

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Farmers remove a security barricade during their march towards Delhi, at Shambhu border, in Patiala, Punjab, on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ballari sees 5th maternal death, probe on

BENGALURU/BALLARI, 6 DEC

Another maternal death has been reported at the Ballari Medical College and Research Centre (BMCRC), bringing the total number of such fatalities in the past month to five.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday assured that an investigation would be conducted into the death that took place on 5 December, while Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao stated he was willing to "resign" if it would help improve the situation.

- The officer stated that there were seven complicated delivery cases, of which two patients were discharged, while five, including the recent case, lost their lives in the past month.

Reportedly, 23-year-old Kolmi Sumaiya was admitted to the hospital on 11 November and underwent a cesarean section. She later developed complications that led to renal failure, senior health department officials told PTI.

Dinesh Gundu Rao ***PHOTO: FB***

The officer stated that there were seven complicated delivery cases, of which two patients were discharged, while five, including the recent case, lost their lives in the past month.

The patient reportedly experienced persistent hypotension, despite being on double inotropes and suffered cardiac arrest at 7.45 pm.

According to the health department, between 9 and 11November, four maternal deaths were reported at the district hospital in Ballari. It was noted that the Ringer Lactate (RL) batches supplied by a West Bengal-based pharma company had been used. "I have suspended officials from the drugs control department," Siddaramaiah said. —*PTI*

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Centre says no rules issued to states for UCC

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The government on Friday rejected suggestions that it has issued guidelines to states to implement a uniform civil code. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserted that "no such guidelines were issued by the Government of India to state governments for implementing the uniform civil code". Responding to a sub-question in the lok sabha, the minister said BR Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, while moving the relevant provision in the Constituent Assembly, had said there is a uniform code of laws in the country, covering almost every aspect of human relationship. A uniform civil code in India has been a key agenda of successive election manifestos of BJP.—*PTI*

Gyanvapi moves SC over pleas against worship law

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The Gyanvapi Mosque management committee has moved Supreme Court to oppose several pending petitions that challenge the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. The law, however, made only one exception -- dispute over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The top court is already seized of about six petitions, including the PILs filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay and former Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy. —*PTI*

RS erupts over 'mystery money' at Singhvi's seat

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

A wad of currency notes discovered at the seat of Congress MP Abhishek Singhvi has sparked significant outrage in the Rajya Sabha, leading to a heated exchange between opposing factions. Singhvi has called for an investigation into the incident, labelling it a serious security lapse. While the chairman, Jagdeep Dhankhar, confirmed that 100 Rs 500 notes were recovered during an anti-sabotage check, he emphasised that it remains unclear if the notes are legitimate.

Abhishek Manu Singhvi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Deputy Chairman Harivansh attempted to restore order as BJP members vociferously demanded explanations from the opposition. The House was adjourned shortly after it reconvened post-lunch amid the uproar. Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge insisted that Singhvi should not have been named without a proper investigation, while BJP's J.P. Nadda accused the opposition of selective outrage.

Singhvi, who stated he had been in the House for just three minutes before heading to the canteen, suggested implementing glass enclosures around seats to prevent unwanted items from being placed in absent MPs' areas. BJP member Radha Mohan Das Aggarwal claimed this incident suggests disunity within the opposition and called for a probe into potential financial distributions among parties. As tensions escalated, Congress MP Imran Masood accused the government of using the incident to distract from critical issues like the Adani controversy. Union Minister Piyush Goyal echoed calls for serious investigation into the matter. —*PTI*

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BJP says US is conspiring to destabilise India

PHOTO: OCCRP

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

BJP on Friday accused the US State Department and "deep state" elements in the country for collaborating with investigative journalists and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for trying to destabilise India. The claim comes despite decades of strong ties between New Delhi and Washington.

BJP alleged that Rahul's Congress used articles from the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), to undermine Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The articles reportedly focused on the alleged corruption involving the Adani Group, accusing its chair, Gautam Adani, and others of a USD 265 million bribery scheme. Adani has denied the allegations and called them baseless.

OCCRP also reported that Indian state-sponsored hackers used Israeli-made Pegasus spyware to target government critics, a claim previously denied by the Centre. BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra cited a report published by French media outlet 'Mediapart' claiming that OCCRP receives 50 per cent of its funding from the US State Department and philanthropist and US billionaire George Soros, accusing the organisation of furthering a "deep state agenda." —*Agencies*

India fumes at Pak for Bhagat remarks

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The Indian government has lodged a strong diplomatic protest with Pakistan regarding objectionable remarks made about Bhagat Singh, a revered figure in India's freedom struggle. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh addressed the Lok Sabha, confirming the government's concerns over disrespect towards cultural icons in Pakistan.

The controversy arose when Asghar Leghari, the advocate general of Punjab, reportedly made inappropriate comments about Bhagat Singh during a court hearing in Lahore last month.

Act against JeM Chief, India to Pak

India also demanded strong action from Pakistan against Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar, after a report emerged that he delivered a speech recently at a public gathering in Bahawalpur. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said if the report is correct, then it has exposed Pakistan's "duplicity" in containing terrorist activities. "We demand that strong action be taken against him (Azhar) and he should be brought to justice. There has been denial that he is not there in Pakistan," Jaiswal said. —*PTI*

China and India agree to ease border tensions

BEIJING, 6 DEC

India and China have agreed to take measures aimed at further reducing tensions along their borders. This agreement follows a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC) held in New Delhi on Thursday, which marked the first dialogue since the comprehensive agreement reached on 21 October to address the prolonged military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

In a press release, the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that both nations positively assessed the solutions implemented regarding border-related issues and expressed a commitment to continue these efforts, ensuring effective communication through diplomatic and military channels to preserve peace and stability in border areas. Reflecting on the lessons learned from the clashes in eastern Ladakh that began in May 2020, the Ministry of External Affairs of India highlighted the importance of preventing future face-offs. —*PTI*

PROPOSAL SENT TO KERC

Power bills may get costlier as Escoms propose 3yr hike

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

The Electricity Distribution Companies (Escoms) have submitted a proposal to the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) seeking to increase electricity rates over the next three years. KERC has initiated a multi-year tariff (MYT) system, prompting the Escoms to request a hike of 67 to 70 paise per unit for the year 2025-26, 70 to 75 paise for 2026-27, and 85 to 90 paise for 2027-28.

If approved, the proposed increases will lead to an increased financial burden for consumers. Karnataka Minister KJ George commented, "It is a routine process...all the stakeholders will be called and it will be discussed."

KERC sources indicated that the rate increase could be uniform across different consumers. In its proposal, Bescom, one of the main Escoms, highlighted a projected revenue shortfall of Rs 2,572.69 crore for the 2025-26 fiscal year, necessitating a 67 paise per unit increase from January 2025 to bridge this gap.

All Escoms, including the Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM), have submitted similar proposals. KERC will review feedback from the public, entrepreneurs, and businesses before issuing a final decision on the potential hike.

George also responded to the Opposition criticism, saying, "Earlier, there were no guarantee schemes, yet they increased the tariff when power purchases were very expensive. Now, we have minimised costs."

He further said, "We have reduced rates, and everything we are doing benefits the public. For instance (monthly), electricity up to 200 units is free, so the common man will not be affected. —*ANI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Metro to run from 5.30am on Sunday due to KPSC exam

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) will begin train services from 5.30am instead of the usual 7am on Sunday to facilitate candidates attending the KPSC-Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) examination on Sunday. In a notification, BMRCL stated that the first train departing from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station in Majestic towards all four directions (Madavara, Challaghatta, Whitefield and Silk Institute) will commence at 5.30am. Between 5.30am and 7am, Metro trains will operate every 30 minutes. The trains will run as scheduled after 7am. *—Salar News*

Students highlight solutions to community woes

MYSURU, 6 DEC

A set of 10 best projects suggested for solving community problems, selected at a recent event for the students and teachers of government schools in Mysuru district, will be presented at the upcoming TiE Global Summit in Bangalore on 10 December. The projects were initially presented at the Vikasa Parva, a six-week entrepreneurship and design thinking workshop, organised by Excel Public School and Excel Empathy Foundation from 23 October to 29 November at the school's Innovation Centre. Altogether 86 students and 36 teachers from 36 government schools participated in the event. Besides, all 36 innovative projects presented at the Vikasa Parva will be submitted for the School Innovation Marathon 2024. *—Salar News*

Campaign launched for rights of sex workers' children

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

Ondede, a City-based NGO working for child rights, women's rights, sexual minority rights, and other vulnerable sections launched an online campaign "Rights of Children of Gender Minorities, Sex Workers, Devadasis, and Single Women" on Ambedkar Mahaparinirvan Diwas on Friday. The initiative aims to address systemic barriers faced by children whose mothers or caregivers cannot provide the father's name on official documents. Over time, numerous administrative rules and regulations have jeopardized the rights of children belonging to gender minorities, sex workers, devadasis, and single women, said a press release released by Ondede. *—Salar News*

Wild elephants trigger scare at fuel station

MYSURU, 6 DEC

Footage of two wild elephants walking majestically into a petrol bunk near Dr Rajkumar Circle in Kollegal town in the wee hours of Friday was captured by a CCTV installed at the fuel station. The staff members at petrol bunk, who spotted the elephants around 1.30am, are seen running for safety. Following the incident, the forest department conducted a search operation to rescue the elephants and drive them back into the woods *—Salar News*

Golden howdah at Mysuru Palace under repair

MYSURU, 6 DEC

The tourists visiting Mysuru Palace will not able to see the golden howdah (carrier mounted on elephant) for a few days, as the authorities have covered it since Thursday for minor repairs.The 750 kg golden howdah is one of the main attractions of Mysuru Naada Habba Dasara celebration, where in the idol of goddess Chamundeshwari is carried on it and taken for Vijayadashami Jamboo Savari procession. *—Salar News*

Oppn flays Cong govt over maternal deaths in Ballari

Ashoka says women do not want Rs 2,000 but good healthcare

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

The recent maternal deaths at the Ballari Medical College and Research Centre (BMCRC) have drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition in Karnataka. R Ashoka, the Leader of the Opposition, slammed the ruling Congress government for failing to ensure the safety of patients. He pointed out that while the government promotes financial assistance schemes like Gruha Lakshmi, the public is increasingly concerned about maternal mortality rates.

Ashoka stated, "Women are saying they don't want Rs 2,000—they want justice." His condemnation highlights a growing dissatisfaction within the community regarding the handling of healthcare issues and the perceived negligence by government authorities. He asserted that the people of Karnataka rightfully demand accountability for these tragic incidents.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao promised that anyone found responsible will face consequences **PHOTO: PTI**

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao emphasised the importance of a thorough investigation, promising that anyone found responsible will face consequences.

He highlighted that the Health Department had written to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) questioning why it was certifying drugs "rejected by Karnataka".

"You approve drugs that we reject. What are we supposed to do next? We can't blacklist the company or reject their products outright because they might then approach the court claiming their product is safe. What should be the next step, and who is responsible for this?" Rao questioned, stressing the need for a "third-party review of drugs".

Rao added that a team of officers had inspected the West Bengal-based drug manufacturer Panschim Banga's facility and was directed to submit a report.

"They have inspected because we need to prosecute the drug manufacturer. We are moving forward with legal action," he said. *—PTI*

- R Ashoka, the Leader of the Opposition in State Assembly, slammed the ruling Congress government for failing to ensure the safety of patients. He said while the government promotes financial assistance schemes like Gruha Lakshmi, the public is increasingly concerned about maternal mortality

2ND CASE IN 20 DAYS

Eshwarappa booked for hate speech on Bangladesh issue

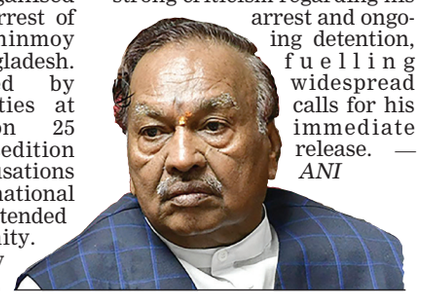
SHIVAMOGGA, 6 DEC

A case has been filed against former deputy chief minister KS Eshwarappa at the Kote Police Station for allegedly making an inflammatory speech during a protest concerning the arrest of Hindus in Bangladesh. This marks the second incident within a span of 20 days against Eshwarappa for similar accusations.

The protest, held at Mathura Paradise in Shivamogga, was organised in response to the arrest of spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh. Das was detained by Bangladeshi authorities at Dhaka airport on 25 November, facing sedition charges linked to accusations of disrespecting the national flag during a rally attended by the Hindu community. West Bengal Assembly Leader of Opposition, Suvendu Adhikari, announced that the Bharatiya Janata Party will stage a blockade at the Basirhat border on 10 December to protest against violence against Hindu minorities.

He emphasised the need to halt these atrocities and called for the release of Chinmoy Krishna Das.

A Bangladesh court has set a hearing date for Das's bail petition on 2 January, 2025, while the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has expressed strong criticism regarding his arrest and ongoing detention, fuelling widespread calls for his immediate release. *—ANI*



Bihar man held in B'luru for killing wife

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

The police have arrested a man from Bihar for the alleged murder of his wife, whose decomposed body was discovered in a drain on the outskirts of Bengaluru. Mohammed Nasim, 39, a painter by profession, was apprehended in Muzaffarpur following the grisly find on 11 November, within the Sarjapur police jurisdiction.

The couple, Nasim and his second wife Rumesh Khatun, 22, reportedly argued frequently over trivial matters, leading to a strained relationship. Suspecting his wife's fidelity and driven by personal grievances, Nasim decided to take her life. After strangling her, he bound her hands and feet with wire and disposed of her body in a nearby drain.

The remains were not recovered until a week later when locals alerted authorities to a foul odour. Following an investigation, police identified the victim and noted the husband's disappearance along with his six children. Nasim has four offspring from his first marriage and two with Khatun.

Utilising technical evidence and mobile tracking, investigators located Nasim in Muzaffarpur, where he allegedly remarried shortly before his arrest. He is now in custody facing charges related to his wife's murder, with the case prompting widespread media attention. *—PTI*

Realtor extorts Rs 2.57 cr from woman

The Central Crime Branch (CCB) has arrested a realtor for allegedly blackmailing a woman with private videos and extorting Rs 2.57 crore from her over several years. Police identified the accused as Mohan Kumar, a real-estate businessman from Chamarajpet. Kumar was allegedly in a relationship with the woman ever since they were pursuing BBA at a private college in Devanahalli. They also made frequent trips to Goa and other destinations, often with Kumar's friends. Kumar allegedly promised the woman of marriage and began physical relationship with her. Without her knowledge, he recorded their private moments, and later used these videos to blackmail her. At first, Kumar coerced the woman into transferring Rs 1.25 crore from her grandmother's account to multiple bank accounts he provided. *—Salar News*

H'yana man held in Rs 15.5L online fraud

Bengaluru Police have arrested a man from Haryana for allegedly cheating a payment gateway firm of Rs 15.5 lakh. Commissioner of Police B Dayananda on Friday said Cashfree Payments India Private Limited filed a complaint on 8 August, alleging fraudulent activity on its payment portal. The officer said the man allegedly operated a company under the name CYEN and registered its website with the Cashfree payment gateway to receive payments from customers. Dayananda said the accused had claimed that firm offered online coaching and study materials for students. Payments worth Rs 15,58,709 were processed through the wallet, after which he refused to deliver them.*—Salar News*

2 peddlers working with prisoner held

Two individuals, Gautham and Faiz Abdullah were arrested for allegedly peddling drugs in Bengaluru on 28 November, police said on Friday. Central Crime Branch (CCB) seized drugs worth Rs 71 lakh from the duo reportedly operating under the instructions of a smuggler jailed in Parappana Agrahara Central Prison.According to officials, Gautham and Faiz smuggled drugs from Kerala into Bengaluru at a cheap price, where they stored the narcotics at a rented house in Chandra Nagar.CCB officials raided the residence and seized a illegal drugs, including 15.5g of MDMA crystal, 934 grams of hydro-ganja, 30 ecstasy pills, LSD strips, and 309g of hashish oil. The investigation revealed that Gautham and Faiz were receiving instructions from a jail inmate, who coordinated the smuggling operation via phone calls. *—Salar News*

AMBEDKAR'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah pays floral tribute to Dr BR Ambedkar's statue on his death anniversary, in front of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Mysuru sees protest over delay in building Ambedkar Bhavan

MYSURU, 6 DEC

The district unit Karnataka Dalith Sangarsha Samaithi on Friday protested at the Town Hall against the delay in the completion of the Dr BR Ambedkar Bhavan on Narayanashastry Road in Mysuru city.

The protestors raised slogans against both Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa for ignoring the delay in the construction work.

They also criticised Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmianth Reddy and other district administration officials, who had garlanded the statue of Dr BR Ambedkar at the Town Hall on Thursday on account 68th Parinibban Diwas. The protesters said the construction of the Ambedkar Bhavan, which had started 12 years ago at the initial cost of Rs 15 crore, could not be completed yet because of the apathy of the officials. DSS convener Bettaiah Kote said the construction cost has now escalated to Rs 41 crore. Though the police made every effort to pacify the protesters, they insisted that the district minister and the deputy commissioner gave a written promise to complete the works within a few months. Reddy said the CM and the district minister had asked for a fresh detailed project report (DPR) with some design changes. Accordingly, the administration has sent a fresh DPR with an estimated cost of Rs 27 crore to complete the works, he said. —Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

BCIC FORMS PANEL OF 9 INDUSTRIES

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

The Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce (BCIC) on Friday announced the formation of a Council of Associations (CoA) in collaboration with nine industry organisations in Karnataka.

The industry bodies include Bidadi Industries Association, Electronics City Industries Association, Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Karnataka Small Scale Industries Association, Karnataka Employees Association, Laghu Udyog Bharathi, Peenya Industries Association and Whitefield Area Commerce & Industries Association.

The CoA is set up to provide a common platform where all issues, concerns and strategies can be freely deliberated upon in the larger interest of the industries in Karnataka, said BCIC President Vineet Verma. *—PTI*

BBMP Chief asks officials to expedite key projects

BENGALURU, 6 DEC

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath has instructed municipal officials to speed up the completion of multiple infrastructure projects across the city, with a particular focus on the white-topping of roads and improving public facilities.

During his visit to the West Zone on Friday, Nath assessed the ongoing work on the 190m stretch from Chickpet Junction to Sultanpet Junction. While one side of the road has already been completed, the other side is currently undergoing curing after concrete pouring.

Nath asked the officials to complete the remaining work by 15 December to facilitate smooth vehicular movement. He also took note of the deteriorated condition of Sultanpet Junction and ordered immediate repairs.

The BBMP chief also visited the JJ Nagar General Hospital in Chamarajpet. *—Salar News*

BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath along with municipal officials inspects a road in West Zone, Bengaluru, on Friday **PHOTO: SALAR**

IN BELAGAVI

Family gets stranded in forest, thanks to Google Maps

BELAGAVI, 6 DEC

A family from Bihar found themselves stranded for an entire night in a closed car deep within the thick forests of Khanapur taluk, after following directions provided by Google Maps on their trip to Goa.

The family, led by Rajdas Ranjitdas from Ujjayini, encountered difficulties after the GPS directed them down a route between Shirodaga and Hemmadaga villages, leading them about 7 kilometres into the Bhimghad wildlife zone. Despite travelling almost 8 kilometres into the jungle, they could not find their way back due to poor mobile network coverage and spent the night locked inside their car, fearful of the wildlife surroundings.

Despite travelling almost 8km into the jungle in Bhimghad wildlife zone, they could not find their way back due to poor mobile network **PHOTO: SALAR**

Khanapur police, led by Inspector Manjunath Nayak, managed to trace the family's location with the help of GPS technology and local villagers. After the family managed to regain a mobile signal and contacted the emergency services, the police were alerted. They quickly mobilised, relying on local hamlet dwellers who were familiar with the area to aid in the rescue operation.

Upon their rescue, Inspector Nayak said the family was fortunate to have escaped without encountering any wildlife, as the area is known to host dangerous animals. Recently, a farmer lost a leg to a bear attack in the same vicinity. During night, the Ranjitdas family opted to remain silent and keep their phones off to maintain darkness.

This incident adds to a worrying trend, as just last month, three individuals tragically lost their lives in an incident involving reckless navigation through adverse conditions in Uttar Pradesh. *—Salar News*

State showcases investment potential in Germany

MUNICH, 6 DEC

Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries, MB Patil, recently led a delegation to Germany as part of the global roadshow for the upcoming Invest Karnataka 2025, the state's flagship investment summit. The visit aimed to highlight Karnataka's robust industrial ecosystem, innovative initiatives, and the ambitious KWIN City project, designed to create a world-class infrastructure hub.

A significant moment of the roadshow was Patil's meeting with Roland Weigert, State Secretary of the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs. They discussed potential synergies in high-growth areas such as artificial intelligence and semiconductor design. Weigert announced plans to lead a Bavarian business delegation to Karnataka in the coming year, reinforcing the relationship between the two regions.

Additionally, Patil engaged with Bavarian State Minister for European and International Affairs, Eric Beisswenger, fostering collaboration in biotechnology and startups through proposed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). The Karnataka delegation also met with key industry players, including the GEA Group. During a conversation with GEA's Chief Operating Officer, Johannes Giloth, they discussed future operational plans in Bengaluru and the company's participation in Invest Karnataka 2025. *—ANI*

Closely following situation in Syria: EAM

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

As Islamist-led rebels are making further advances in Syria, India on Friday said it is closely following the situation in the Arab Republic. Rebels have nearly taken control of the central Syrian city of Homs after capturing much of Aleppo, the country's largest city. Tens of thousands of people have been fleeing Homs. The External Affairs Ministry is closely following the situation, and around 90 Indian nationals, including 14 working in UN organisations, are in Syria. Their mission remains in close contact for their safety and security. Jaiswal made the remarks in response to a question at his weekly media briefing. *—PTI*

Manipur students protest over ST scholarship delay

IMPHAL, 6 DEC

At least 200 tribal students of different colleges in Manipur staged a protest near the Raj Bhavan here demanding immediate release of Scheduled Tribe scholarship for 2023-24, police said. Holding placards and raising slogans, the students, under the aegis of All College Tribal Students Union (ACTSU), gathered in front of GP Women's College near Raj Bhavan to make their demand. They were, however, prevented from taking out a rally by security forces deployed at the location, leading to a brief confrontation. Police used teargas to disperse agitating students, who reported breathing difficulties but no serious injuries. Student representative G Panmei stated ST scholarships for 2023-24 have not been released, and they will meet tribal affairs officials to discuss further action. *—PTI*

BRS leaders under house arrest ahead of protest

HYDERABAD, 6 DEC

Ahead of a protest called by the BRS on Friday against the Congress government's alleged "repression" on different issues in Telangana, the opposition party claimed that the police turned up at several of its leaders' houses and restricted their movement. Party leaders, including MLAs T Harish Rao, KP Vivekanand and MLC K Kavitha were put under "house arrest", it said. The BRS has called for a protest at the giant Ambedkar's statue on NTR Marg at Hussain Sagar Lake here against the state government's alleged repression and arrests of its leaders over different issues. BRS MLA P Kaushik Reddy was arrested on Thursday for allegedly obstructing, threatening and abusing a police official here. Some BRS leaders, including Harish Rao, were placed under preventive custody on Thursday by the police when they went to meet Kaushik Reddy at his residence and allegedly argued with the police. Rao and others were let off Thursday night. The protest called by BRS on Friday coincides with the grand first anniversary celebrations planned by the Congress government at the Hussain Sagar Lake for four days beginning from Friday. *—PTI*

Hurriyat Chief says he is placed under house arrest

RINAGAR, 6 DEC

Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Friday claimed that he has been put under house arrest and prevented from offering the congregational prayers at the Jamia Masjid here. "As I was about to leave for Jama Masjid for the Friday sermon and prayers, I have been verbally informed that I am under house arrest today and won't be allowed to go to Jama Masjid!" the Mirwaiz, who is also the chief cleric of Kashmir, said in a post on X. He speculated that the reason for being prevented from visiting the grand mosque in Nowhatta, could be related to the 32nd anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. *—PTI*

LS stalled as BJP links Cong and Soros

Cong strongly objected, leading to chaotic scenes

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Lok Sabha proceedings were on Friday adjourned for the day amid protests by Opposition members over BJP's attempts to link the Congress party to US-based billionaire investor George Soros.

BJP member Nishikant Dubey raised the issue during Zero Hour, plunging the House into chaos with Congress members trooping to the Well of the House. Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav and Trinamool member Saugata Roy were also up on their feet, apparently in support of the Congress.

Dubey had also raised the issue on Thursday, prompting the Congress members to rise in protests against BJP's attempts to link Soros with Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

On Friday, the Lok Sabha was adjourned till noon within a minute of assembling at 11am as Congress members Gaurav Gogoi and K C Venugopal tried to counter the allegations levelled by Dubey. When the House re-assembled at noon, BJP member Dilip Saikia, who was in the chair, allowed laying of parliamentary papers on the table of the House, before calling Dubey to speak on the issue he could not complete on Thursday.

BJP member Nishikant Dubey raised the issue during Zero Hour, plunging the House into chaos **PHOTO: PTI**

Congress members trooped to the Well of the House raising slogans against the BJP and the government.

Saikia then adjourned the proceedings for the day.

At 11 am, opposition members mostly from the Congress, tried to raise some issues which the Speaker objected to. "You don't want to allow the Question Hour to continue? The House has high standard and I can't allow it to be lowered. I can't allow the dignity of the House to be lowered," he said and adjourned the House immediately. *—PTI*

Traitor RaGa: Cong moves privilege motion

Oppn protested with masks over Adani row

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Congress MP Hibi Eden has submitted a notice to move a privilege motion against BJP MP Sambit Patra for his remarks calling Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi "traitor of the highest order", asserting that the usage of "completely defamatory and unparliamentary words" has clearly violated constitutional norms.

In his letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Eden said, "I wish to raise a motion of privilege and bring to your attention the completely unparliamentary conduct of Sambit Patra, MP Lok Sabha, against the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi."

In a press conference held on December 5, Patra has referred to the Leader of Opposition as "traitor of the highest order" while making unfounded allegations against the LoP, he said.

"The usage of such words against the LOP, while being defamatory and unacceptable in public life, is also a complete breach of parliamentary privilege of the LoP," Eden argued.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi protest over Adani issue in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Patra claimed that billionaire investor George Soros and some US-based agencies, investigative media platform "Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)" and Gandhi occupy three sides of a "dangerous" triangle trying to destabilise India and stoke public disaffection for a regime change in the country.

Wearing black masks with "Modi, Adani bhai-bhai" printed on them and holding a copy of the Constitution, several Opposition MPs led by the Congress held a protest march inside the Parliament complex on the Adani issue on Friday.

The protest saw several leaders from some of the INDIA bloc parties marching and raising slogans against the Adani group. *—PTI*

Modi govt will purchase all farm produce at MSP: Agri Minister

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan assured the Rajya Sabha on Friday that the Narendra Modi administration will purchase all farm produce at the minimum support price (MSP). This declaration coincided with a farmers' foot march to Delhi, where they demanded legal backing for MSP.

Speaking during the Question Hour, Chouhan affirmed, "I want to assure the house that all produce of farmers will be purchased at minimum support price. This is the Modi government and a guarantee to fulfil Modi's guarantee." He referenced previous government statements rejecting the MS Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, arguing that the current administration has provided a more favourable stance since 2019 by calculating MSP to include a 50 per cent profit margin over production costs.

- Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar commended Chouhan's commitment to farmers, outlining a future focus on increasing farmers' income while dismissing calls for a farm loan waiver

Chouhan highlighted the ongoing procurement of crops like paddy, wheat, and soyabean at enhanced prices, pledging to continue this support. Responding to Congress MP Jairam Ramesh's queries on MSP, Chouhan stated, "We will fix MSP at more than 50 per cent profit and purchase the produce of farmers too."

Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar commended Chouhan's commitment to farmers, outlining a future focus on increasing farmers' income while dismissing calls for a farm loan waiver. Chouhan reiterated the government's goal of enhancing agricultural production and diversifying farming practices, aiming for financial stability among farmers without the need for loan waivers. *—PTI*

MAHAYUTI 2.0

M'rashtra cabinet expansion likely on 11 or 12 Dec

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

The Cabinet expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government is anticipated to occur on 11 or 12 December, according to sources.

Reports suggest that the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is likely to retain the Finance portfolio, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will maintain control of the Home department, as was the case under the previous Eknath Shinde-led administration. Meanwhile, the Shinde-led Shiv Sena is set to retain the Urban Development portfolio, with the possibility of also securing the Revenue department, as per local sources.

The Maharashtra Cabinet can accommodate a maximum of 43 ministers, including the Chief Minister. It is expected that the BJP, as the largest member of the Mahayuti alliance, will be allocated 21 to 22 ministerial positions. The Shiv Sena is projected to receive 11 to 12 posts, while the NCP is likely to secure nine to ten berths, according to insiders.

A senior BJP leader indicated that the final count of ministers who will take the oath is expected to be confirmed within the next few days. Newly-elected MLAs will be sworn in by pro-tem Speaker Kalidas Kolambkar during a three-day special session of the assembly commencing Saturday.

BJP had planned to go ahead with the swearing-in ceremony without Eknath Shinde. Had he maintained the stubborn attitude to pressure BJP, its brass had informed (the state leadership) to go ahead without him

-Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has said that Hindutva played an important role in the recent state assembly elections, and counter-polarisation helped the Mahayuti alliance score a big win. *—PTI*

Kejri accuses BJP of voter deletion plot

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Friday accused BJP of orchestrating large-scale deletions of voters' names from the electoral rolls in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections.

Kejriwal claimed that BJP leaders had submitted applications to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to remove thousands of voter names from constituencies like Shahdara, Janakpuri, and Laxmi Nagar.

Citing the example of Shahdara, Kejriwal alleged that the BJP had applied to delete 11,018 voter names from the constituency.

"When we randomly checked 500 of these names, we found that 75 percent of the people are still residing at the listed addresses. This is nothing but an attempt to manipulate the electoral process," he said.

The AAP leader connected the alleged deletions to the saffron party's narrow victory in Shahdara during the 2020 Assembly elections, where AAP won by a margin of just 5,294 votes. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva dismissed Kejriwal' allegations as "baseless" and accused AAP of shielding fraudulent voters. "The greatest strength of Indian democracy is free speech, but the baseless comments made against constitutional institutions need to be examined."

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with party leader Manish Sisodia at party office, in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, Senior AAP leader and party's chief whip in Delhi Assembly Dilip Pandey on Friday hinted that he may be denied ticket for the upcoming polls from Timarpur seat, saying it was time for him to do something else. *—PTI*

Surendra Pal joins AAP ahead of Delhi Assembly polls

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Two-time MLA from Timarpur constituency Surendra Pal Singh Bittu joined AAP on Friday ahead of Delhi Assembly elections.

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia welcomed Singh into the party and said his experience will help the party in its development work.

"Inspired by the good developmental work of the AAP in the field of education, health, etc., Singh is joining our party today, and I am sure that his experience will help the party to continue doing good work," Sisodia said.

"There is only one party that truly understands the needs of the common people and I will work shoulder to shoulder with the AAP," Singh said after joining the party. *—PTI*

Soren keeps Home; Cong gets Finance, Health

RANCHI, 6 DEC

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Friday allocated portfolios among the newly appointed ministers in his government, consolidating power within the coalition following its strong electoral victory.

Soren kept key departments such as Home and Personnel to himself, while allotting other major portfolios like Finance, Health and Panchayati Raj to Congress legislators.

The new cabinet consists of 12 ministers - seven from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), four from Congress, and one from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

The lone RJD minister was given Industries and Labour.

Radhakrishna Kishore, a Congress MLA, was appointed to oversee Finance, Commercial Tax, Planning and Development, and Parliamentary Affairs, giving him responsibility for the state's fiscal health and legislative matters.

JMM's Deepak Biruwa received the portfolios of Revenue, Registration and Land Reforms (non-registration), and Transport, focusing on land management and transportation.

Congress MLA Irfan Ansari was entrusted with Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare, Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, and Disaster Management. *—PTI*

'NO DEAL DURING DMK REGIME'

Balaji denies Stalin-Adani ties, warns action

CHENNAI, 6 DEC

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin did not meet industrialist Gautam Adani nor was any contract signed with the Adani group, state Electricity Minister V Senthil Balaji stated on Friday and warned of legal action against those spreading rumours in this regard.

The DMK regime did not enter into any contract and there was only a case pertaining to the purchase of power at 7.01 per unit pending in the Supreme Court, he said, referring to the 2015 agreement entered upon during the AIADMK rule for a 25-year period to buy power from the company's 648 MW solar plant in Ramanathapuram district.

TN Minister Balaji slammed media for spreading a false campaign **PHOTO: PTI**

"No agreement was signed with the Adani group during the DMK regime and the chief minister did not meet the industrialist," the minister said. "Strict legal action will be initiated against those spreading a campaign," Balaji said and condemned the opposition parties and the media for spreading a fictitious campaign that Stalin met Adani and signed an agreement to get solar power at a high price. *— PTI*

Religious bigotry and casteist ideas will never be fulfilled in the land of Periyar and the state developed on the principles of Ambedkar. You will not be able to succeed as long as this Stalin exists

-MK Stalin, TN CM

B'desh summons Kolkata mission head for talks

KOLKATA, 6 DEC

Bangladesh has called upon Shikder Mohammad Ashrafur Rahman, the Acting Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata, for urgent consultations after a series of protests regarding the treatment of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

Rahman, who also holds the position of Minister for Political Affairs, has returned to Dhaka. A senior official from the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata, speaking on the condition of anonymity, confirmed, "He was summoned due to ongoing protests outside our mission. Rahman will also participate in the forthcoming foreign secretary-level talks planned between the two nations next week and is expected back by mid-December."

In a related incident, the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala, Tripura, suspended all visa and consular services, citing "security reasons." This decision follows a protest where demonstrators breached the mission's premises to voice grievances over the arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in Dhaka. Amid rising tensions, the Bangladesh foreign ministry summoned the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka to register a formal protest concerning the vandalism at the Agartala mission. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

UP slapgate teacher surrenders, gets bail

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 6 DEC

A teacher who asked other students to slap a Muslim boy at a school in UP's Muzaffarnagar surrendered at a POCSO court and was released on bail, an official said on Friday. Tripta Tyagi was caught last year in a video, asking children to slap a boy in a school where she taught. Additional District Judge (POCSO) Alka Bharti on Thursday granted her bail and ordered her to furnish two sureties of Rs 25,000 each. She posted the matter for Saturday. Kapil Ahlawat, Tyagi's lawyer, said the accused surrendered in the Special POCSO court on Thursday and sought regular bail. On 23 November, the Allahabad High Court rejected her plea for anticipatory bail. *—PTI*

Jawan dies of heart attack amid J&K search op

SRINAGAR, 6 DEC

An Army personnel died of cardiac arrest during a search operation in the upper areas of Srinagar on Friday, officials said. They identified the jawan as Jasvinder Singh of the Army's 34 Assam Rifles. The search operation was going on in the forest area of Harwan in Srinagar in the wake of Tuesday's encounter in the nearby Dachigam, in which Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Junaid Ahmed Bhat was killed. Bhat, a Category A LeT terrorist, was involved in the 20 October attack near a tunnel construction site in the Gagangir area of Ganderbal in which a doctor and six labourers were killed. Since the encounter on Tuesday, security forces have launched search operations in the vast forest area to trace terrorists. *—PTI*

20 dead in multiple road accidents across UP

PILIBHIT/CHITRAKOOOT, 6 DEC

A total of 20 people lost their lives, and several others were injured in separate of road accidents across Pilibhit, Chitrakoot, and Kannauj districts of Uttar Pradesh on Friday, police said. In Pilibhit, six people were killed when a car carrying a wedding party crashed into a tree and plunged into a ditch around midnight. In Chitrakoot, another six died when an SUV collided head-on with a truck. In Kannauj, eight passengers travelling in a private bus lost their lives when the bus struck a water tanker on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the loss of lives in the Kannauj accident and announced an ex-gratia of Rs. 2 lakh from the PMNRF for the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured. *—PTI*

'Pushpa 2' show in Mumbai halted after spray fiasco

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

The screening of blockbuster film 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' had to be halted for 10-15 minutes in a theatre in Mumbai's Bandra area after someone from the audience allegedly sprayed some substance into the air, causing coughing, vomiting and throat irritation to several others, a police official said on Friday. The incident took place on Thursday evening in Galaxy theatre, the official added. "The audience alerted the theatre management, which approached Bandra police. A team rushed there and halted the show for some 10-15 minutes, but a check of people inside did not throw up any suspicious object that may have caused the incident," he said. *—PTI*

On 32 yrs of Babri, security beefed up in UP

Cops, Anti-Terrorist Squads deployed in Ayodhya, Sambhal and Mathura to prevent clashes

AYODHYA, 6 DEC

Security has been heightened in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya along with Sambhal and Mathura on Friday on the 32nd anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition.

Police personnel, Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) commando have been deployed to.

Security was increased in Sambhal ahead of Friday prayers at Shahi Jama Masjid, following a stone-pelting incident on 24 November.

The stone-pelting incident occurred on 24 November during the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASIs) examination of the Mughal-era mosque, resulting in the deaths of four individuals and injuries to several others, including officials and locals.

The ASI survey followed a petition filed in a local court, claiming that the mosque's site was originally a Harihar temple.

Police personnel patrol in a sensitive area in view of Friday prayers and the Babri Masjid demolition anniversary in Kanpur on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Security was beefed up outside the Shahi Eidgah in Mathura.

Mathura City Superintendent of Police, Arvind Kumar said that the area has been divided into four zones and barricades have been placed at the sensitive spots.

The police official stated that the administration will take action against those who disobey these rules.

Earlier, a bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar deferred the hearing into the Mathura's Krishna Janmabhoomi and Shahi Masjid case. Various petitions were heard by the Supreme Court on the dispute.

- Meanwhile, on Thursday, the police administration tightened security and conducted checks at several locations in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain district. A police official stated that the security campaign will continue further.

In one of these matters, the Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah has approached the Supreme Court challenging the Allahabad High Court order rejecting the mosque committee challenging the maintainability of various lawsuits initiated by Hindu devotees.

More than 15 suits by different plaintiffs have been filed claiming competing rights over the Shahi Masjid Eidgah on the ground that it is the site of the birthplace of Lord Shri Krishna (Krishna Janmabhoomi).

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the police administration tightened security and conducted checks at several locations in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain district.

A police official stated that the security campaign will continue further. The Babri Masjid was demolished on December 6, 1992, in Ayodhya by a large group of 'kar sevaks'. In the aftermath, many Muslim residences in Ayodhya were ransacked, torched, and destroyed. Riots erupted across various parts of the country, resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 people. *—ANI*

HC slams Centre, Kerala over Wayanad disaster aid

KOCHI, 6 DEC

The Kerala High Court on Friday criticised the Centre and Kerala government for lack of clarity regarding the disaster relief and rehabilitation fund accounts in connection with the landslides that hit Wayanad in July this year.

A bench of Justices AK Jayasankaran Nambiar and Mohmmed Nias CP directed that the Finance Officer of the State Disaster Management Authority be present in person on Saturday to present the accounts.

The court also posed several queries, including how much funds were required for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the landslides-hit areas of Wayanad and the amount of financial assistance to be provided by the Centre, to which it wanted answers.

The queries also included how much amount was there in the relief fund before the disaster, how much was available for use out of it and what portion of the amount allocated by the Centre was utilised.

The court also posed several queries, including how much funds were required for reconstruction of the landslides-hit areas *PHOTO: PTI*

The queries came during the hearing of a plea initiated by it for prevention and management of natural disasters in the state in the wake of the landslides that devastated three villages in Wayanad district and claimed over 200 lives.

Two weeks ago, the Centre had told the court that a high-level committee had approved around Rs 153 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) towards the Wayanad landslide disaster related relief efforts. It had also informed the HC that the Kerala government provided its requirement for Rs 2,219 crore towards recovery and reconstruction only on November 13 and that it was under consideration. *—PTI*

AT SABARIMALA

HC fumes as actor gets VIP darshan

KOCHI, 6 DEC

The Kerala High Court on Friday criticised the police and the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) for providing "VIP darshan" to Malayalam actor Dileep at the Lord Ayyappa shrine in Sabarimala during the ongoing pilgrimage season, observing that it "hindered" darshan of many devotees who had stood in line for several hours.

A bench of Justices Anil K Narendran and Muralee Krishna S questioned on what basis such privilege was given to the actor on 5 December and directed that the CCTV footage of the same be submitted in the court on Saturday.

The court also sought a report from the police, explaining how the preferential treatment was given to Dileep.

The bench said the actor stood in the front row before the Sopanam throughout the "Harivarasanam" (lullaby to Lord Ayyappa) till the close of the temple for the day.

Actor Dileep *PHOTO: PTI*

"What is the privilege he is having? Will it not obstruct or hinder the darshan of other devotees, which includes children and aged persons, who have been standing in queue for several hours?

"Many of them had to wait and many others had to move on without having darshan. To whom will they complain? How was he given special treatment?" the court asked. *—PTI*

MAN DUPED OF ₹59L BY FAKE CBI OFFICIALS

THANE, 6 DEC

A 54-year-old man from Thane, Maharashtra, was defrauded of Rs 59 lakh by cybercriminals posing as Customs and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officers, police reported. The incident unfolded between 26 November and 2 December.

The victim received multiple phone calls from an individual claiming to be a Customs officer based in Delhi.

He informed the victim that a parcel linked to him had been seized, allegedly containing drugs. The caller asserted that the matter would be escalated to the CBI. To resolve the situation and clear his name, the victim was pressured into transferring Rs 59 lakh to several bank accounts. *—PTI*

Centre to launch TB elimination programme

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The Union Health Ministry, in collaboration with key stakeholders, is poised to launch a 100-day tuberculosis (TB) elimination campaign aimed at improving detection, reducing diagnostic delays, and enhancing treatment outcomes.

This initiative will be rolled out across 347 districts in 33 states and Union Territories and seeks to strengthen TB programme activities while addressing disparities in treatment outcomes nationwide.

The campaign intends to boost performance on crucial indicators including TB incidence rates, diagnostic coverage, and mortality rates. This initiative aligns with the Ministry's recent policy improvements, such as increased financial support for TB patients under the Nikshay Poshan Yojana and support for household contacts through the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan.

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, JP Nadda, will launch the campaign from Panchkula, Haryana, on Saturday.

The initiative underscores the government's commitment to tackling TB notification and mortality challenges within the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP).

This campaign echoes Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a TB-free India, first articulated during the 2018 Delhi End TB Summit.

Since then, several critical measures have been implemented to enhance prevention, diagnostics, and treatment services. Key focus areas will include increasing access to advanced diagnostics, targeted screening for vulnerable populations, specialised care for high-risk individuals, and expanded nutritional support, leveraging the extensive network of Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs to reach those in need. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Puducherry declared natural calamity-hit area

PUDUCHERRY, 6 DEC

The territorial government declared the regions of Puducherry, Karaikal, and Yanam as "natural calamity-affected areas" on Friday, following the extensive damage caused by Cyclone Fengal and torrential rains in November and December 2024.

District Collector A Kulothungan issued a notification, designating these regions as affected areas for the Fasli year 1434, which runs from 1 July, 2024, to 30 June, 2025.

Puducherry Chief Minister N Rangasamy announced several relief measures on 2 December to address the destruction caused by Cyclone Fengal and the unprecedented rainfall that recently lashed the Union Territory. *—PTI*

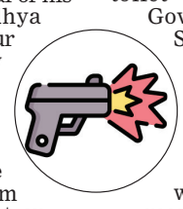
UPSET OVER SCOLDING

Boy shoots principal dead in MP

CHHATARPUR, 6 DEC

A Class XII student allegedly shot dead the principal of his school in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district on Friday afternoon after being admonished for coming late, police officials said.

He and his classmate from the Arts stream escaped from the spot on the deceased's scooter, they added.



Superintendent of Police Agam Jain said Principal SK Saxena (55) was shot in the head at the entrance of the toilet of Dhamora Government Higher School at around 1:30pm. City Superintendent of Police Aman Mishra told PTI only one round was fired from a locally-made pistol, which is yet to be recovered.

"The two accused were upset at being scolded for coming late today as well as on earlier occasions," said Mishra, who was at the crime spot helming the probe.

Saxena was principal of Dhamora Government Higher School for the past five years, in charge district education officer RP Prajapati said.

A teacher at the institution, Harishankar Joshi, told reporters that Saxena was a "gem of a person" and claimed the alleged shooter was a "notorious lad" who attended school as per his whims. *—PTI*

100 M'rashtra students fall ill after meal

CHANDRAPUR, 6 DEC

More than 100 students were hospitalised due to suspected food poisoning in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district, an official said on Friday.

A total of 106 students of Zilla Parishad school in Pardi in the district's Saoli tehsil had meals in the institution on Wednesday afternoon and then complained of stomach ache and experienced vomiting later that night, the official said. "After they reached school on Thursday, the students showed the same symptoms. So they were first taken to the rural hospital and primary health centre. They were shifted to other facilities later. Currently, 62 students are in the sub-district hospital in Mul tehsil, 20 in Gadchiroli district hospital, 17 in Saoli and the rest in Chandrapur's Government Medical College and Hospital," district civil surgeon Dr Mahadeo Chinchole said. "The students are in stable condition and are under observation at these hospitals. The food samples have been collected by the Food and Drug Administration for analysis as part of the probe," Chinchole added. *—PTI*

'SPEEDY TRIAL A RIGHT'

Undertrial can't be jailed indefinitely: SC

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Speedy conclusion of trial is a fundamental right and an undertrial cannot be subjugated to indefinite incarceration, the Supreme Court said on Friday.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and Pankaj Mithal therefore granted bail to a man, who was in custody for about 4.2 years in a case lodged in Bihar, observing the case's trial wouldn't be over soon.

The top court's order came on a plea filed by one Raushan Singh, who challenged the Patna High Court's June verdict dismissing his bail application.

Singh's counsel informed the bench that the petitioner was in custody since his arrest in October, 2020, and the case's trial was still inconclusive.

The top court's order came on a plea filed by Raushan Singh, who challenged the Patna High Court's June verdict *PHOTO: PTI*

The counsel appearing for the state said three more prosecution witnesses were to be examined in the case.

The bench noted as per the state's counsel, the delay in trial was attributed to a discharge application filed by one of the accused in the case.

"Having considered the period of incarceration and the fact that trial may not be concluded on a near date, we deem it appropriate to allow bail to the petitioner – Raushan Singh," held the bench, adding appropriate bail conditions were to be imposed by the trial court.

While dismissing his bail application previously, the High Court directed the trial court to conclude the trial as expeditiously as possible, preferably within six months. *—PTI*

8 Hashimpura convicts get bail

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The Supreme Court on Friday granted bail to eight convicts in the infamous 1987 Hashimpura case involving the massacre of 38 persons by the Provincial Armed Constabulary personnel.

A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih took note of the submissions of senior advocate Amit Anand Tiwari, appearing for four convicts, that they were suffering prolonged incarceration after the Delhi High Court reversed their acquittal by the trial court in the case.

On Friday, senior advocate Tiwari, while representing Sami Ullah, Niranjan Lal, Mahesh Prasad, and Jaipal Singh, argued the appellants had been in jail for over six years since the high court verdict.

The Hashimpura massacre occurred on 22 May, 1987 when Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) personnel, belonging to the 41st Battalion's "C-Company", allegedly rounded up approximately 50 Muslim men from Hashimpura in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, during communal tensions.

The men were taken to the city outskirts and shot dead, and their bodies were dumped in a canal. *—PTI*

FOR STRONGER PENALTIES

People under the banner of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India stage a protest demanding stricter penalties for animal cruelty, at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi, on Friday
PHOTO: PTI

Can Adani be tried in the US for India crimes?

The recent allegations by US prosecutors highlight jurisdictional complexities of charging a person living in another country with an alleged crime committed there.

It is a tumultuous time for Gautam Adani, the billionaire Chairman of the Adani Group, and one of the richest people in the world.

The United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has accused Adani and others of conspiring to pay about USD265 million in bribes to Indian government officials to obtain contracts and develop India's largest solar power plant project.

US prosecutors unveiled in November an indictment of Adani, his nephew Sagar Adani and five others. The Adani Group has rejected these claims, calling them baseless.

Amid all this, Adani remains defiant. "This is not the first time we have faced such challenges … every attack makes us stronger and every obstacle becomes a stepping stone," Adani said on Sunday at an award ceremony he was attending in the western Indian city of Jaipur, his first public appearance after the indictment. A grand jury indictment means that an empanelled jury, and a judge, are convinced that there is enough evidence to merit a continuing investigation and to potentially move ahead to trial, Irfan Nooruddin, an authority on US SEC corruption cases, told Indian outlet The Print. However, the bar for a grand jury indictment is lower than the bar for a jury trial, he added.

Indian senior criminal lawyer Vikas Pahwa told Al Jazeera, "The Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) mandates investigations into bribery involving Indian officials be conducted by Indian authorities like the CBI [Central Bureau of Investigation]. Trials, if any, would also fall under Indian jurisdiction."However, the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) governs acts of bribery involving US-linked entities, such as those using US financial systems or targeting American investors. Allegations against Adani and others include violations of anti-bribery provisions and misleading US investors during a USD 600 million bond offering (which was withdrawn once the charges became public). Since both nations are signatories to mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs), they need to cooperate to ensure evidence adheres to international standards.

If convicted Gautam Adani could face decades in prison but would probably receive far less time and he could also face financial penalties
PHOTO: PTI

"Adani's defence may argue the lack of a direct US connection to the alleged acts and emphasise compliance with Indian anticorruption laws," Pahwa added. Meaning, if an investigation in India clears Adani and his co-accused of these charges, that would work in their defence in the US, he said.

In terms of next steps, the US needs to issue a formal extradition request to the Indian government to bring the accused to the US for a trial. Earlier this month New Delhi said it has not received any such request. There has been no update from the government since then.

For Adani to step forward with his defence, he will have to present his case in a court in the US. He will be entitled to a speedy trial within 70 days if he demands one in a US court. US Attorney Breon Peace, who unveiled the charges, can issue international arrest warrants for Adani and his co-defendants. In case of any such lookout notice or international warrant, they could be arrested outside India (Interpol has no jurisdiction within India), curtailing their travel.

Since India and the US have an extradition treaty, India is obligated to consider the request should it come.

That process would be handled by a court in India, which would need to consider several factors including whether the crime he was charged with within the US is also a crime in India, whether the charges are politically motivated or whether he could face inhumane treatment in the US.

Adani is also perceived to be close to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that relationship might help him clear these charges in India, critics say. For now, the government has chosen to distance itself and said "this is a legal matter involving private firms and individuals and the US Department of Justice. We are not part of it in any manner at this point of time," India's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told the media during a news briefing on 29 November. A jury of 12 would need to unanimously vote to convict Adani, and he could appeal a verdict against him. He could face decades in prison if convicted, but would probably receive far less time. He could also face financial penalties.

Any sentence would ultimately be up to the judge overseeing the case. *—Al Jazeera*

SALAR ساڈا سالار بنگلور

Bluesky's resemblance to Twitter attracts millions

What would you say at Twitter's funeral?

That's the question my collaborators and I asked over 1,000 people on social media as part of a broader research project on Twitter migration. Responses ranged from the profane to the poetic, but one common theme was that despite its significant flaws, Twitter at its best was truly great … until it wasn't.

"The world is a better place for it having existed, and a better place now that it's gone." Since Tesla CEO Elon Musk purchased Twitter, now branded as X, in October 2022, there have been reports of mass migration from the platform, and much ink was spilled – including some by me, a researcher who studies online communities – speculating where those users might land.

The decentralised social network Mastodon attracted a lot of early attention, gaining a significant influx of users in the months following Musk's acquisition of Twitter. In July 2023, Meta's microblogging platform Threads gained 30 million users in its first day. Other Twitter alternatives appeared in 2023, some of which have chugged along with relatively small user bases, while others have already shut down. But these days, all the buzz seems to be about Bluesky.

Bluesky was created in 2019 as a research project within Twitter led by then-CEO Jack Dorsey. It eventually severed ties with Twitter and became an independent company following Musk's acquisition. The goal with Bluesky was to build a decentralized standard for social media that Twitter could eventually adopt. In that way, Bluesky is comparable to Mastodon in that they both allow for the creation of different servers that interact, and users can move their data and network between servers.

But what does all this mean for your experience on Bluesky? If you are confused by – or just don't care about – centralized versus decentralized social media, Bluesky won't seem very different. It looks and feels a lot like Twitter. Nearly all of Bluesky currently operates from a single server, bsky.social, which means that you don't have to choose a server when you sign up and your experience is contained there. Though Bluesky provides the option for users to host their own server and therefore store and control their own data, most users will experience what they're accustomed to on traditional, centralized social media.

As for an immediate alternative in November 2022, Mastodon had a significant head start because Bluesky hadn't launched, and when it did in February 2023 it remained invitation-only for about a year. Threads didn't launch until July 2023. Though Mastodon has a very dedicated user base, , there are a number of factors that have limited widespread adoption.

Bluesky in particular saw huge growth in November, topping 20 million users, and at the time of this writing is still gaining several users per second.

Though media and popular attention has been focused on Bluesky, Threads, which has nearly 300 million users, saw even more new sign-ups in November than Bluesky's entire user base. Nevertheless, even Meta seems to be focused on Bluesky's surge. It has scrambled to incorporate features into Threads that are selling points of Bluesky, such as customizable feeds.

Perhaps Bluesky's growth is particularly impressive – and therefore threatening to Meta – because it occurred essentially by word of mouth. In contrast, Threads has an absolutely enormous advertising platform: Instagram. Not only can Threads users simply use their existing Instagram accounts, but Meta has also started pushing Threads posts to Instagram.

So when considering these three major Twitter alternatives – Mastodon, Bluesky and Threads – Bluesky's moment actually makes a lot of sense to me. It feels less corporate than Meta's Threads, and so it represents an alternative to Big Tech platforms controlled by billionaires. It also appeals to people who believe in the vision of decentralized social media or who want the option to control their data. But at the same time, the user experience is nearly identical to familiar, traditional social media, and it addresses some of the challenges identified with Mastodon, such as the learning curve for choosing a server.

A surge in creation and use of starter packs on Bluesky – curated lists of people to follow – have also accelerated the creation of community and social networks.

And the sudden buzz around the platform all at once has created momentum for entire former Twitter communities, such as Academic Twitter, to partially reconstitute themselves. *—PTI*

A surge in creation and use of starter packs on Bluesky – curated lists of people to follow – have also accelerated the creation of community and social networks
PHOTOS: X

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Why rebel capture of Syria's Hama, city with dark history, matters

It was one of the darkest moments in the modern history of the Arab world. More than four decades ago, Hafez Assad, then president of Syria, launched what came to be known as the Hama Massacre.

Between 10,000 to 40,000 people were killed or disappeared in the government attack on the central Syrian city. It began on 2 February, 1982, and lasted for nearly a month, leaving the city in ruins.

The memory of the government assault and the month-long siege on the city, which at the time was a stronghold of Syria's Muslim Brotherhood, remains visceral in Syrian and Arab minds.

Now Islamist insurgents have captured the city, tearing down a poster of Hafez Assad's son, President Bashar Assad, and swarming security and government offices — scenes unimaginable 40 years ago.

The moment carried great symbolism in Syria's long-running civil war, which began 13 years ago but many say is rooted in Hama.

A dark history

Hama, Syria's fourth-largest city, is known for its quaint waterwheels, a landmark attraction along the banks of the Orontes River.

In the early 1980s, the city's name became synonymous with killings.

It was the scene of Muslim Brotherhood-led anti-government attacks that targeted military officers, state institutions and ruling party offices. In February 1982, Hafez Assad ordered an assault on the city to quell the unrest.

In a matter of days, government warplanes destroyed most of the city, opening the way for ground troops.

Hafez Assad's brother, Rifaat, led the artillery unit that shelled the city and killed thousands, earning him the nickname the "Butcher of Hama."

Only this year, Rifaat Assad was indicted in Switzerland for war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with Hama. An international arrest warrant was issued for him three years earlier.

The massacre created resentment that fanned the flames of another uprising against Hafez Assad's son years later.

In 2011, Hama and surrounding towns became the epicenter of some of the biggest protests against Surian President Bashar Assad, which started in 2011 during a wave of Arab uprising
PHOTO: PTI

The epicenter of protests

In 2011, Hama and surrounding towns became the epicenter of some of the biggest protests against Bashar Assad, which started in 2011 during a wave of Arab uprisings.

The protests forced government security forces to withdraw from the city briefly in June 2012, leaving the opposition in control and fueling a brief sense of liberation, in a place that had once been pounded by Syrian warplanes.

Residents at that time painted walls around the city in red, threw red paint on the waterwheels to symbolise the Hama massacre and tried to organize local administration. About 800,000 people lived there at the start of the uprising.

"Erhal ya Bashar," a protest chant that means "Come on, leave, Bashar" was popularized in the Hama protests.

But government forces returned in August of that year, with a brutal assault that caused mass casualties in the first 24 hours. The leader of the chants was later killed, his throat slit by government forces.

Aron Lund, a longtime Syria expert at Century International, a New York-based think tank, said Hama has obvious symbolic value because of the history of the massacre. He described it as a "huge event in Syrian history and really formative for the opposition and the Islamist opposition in particular."

The brutal crackdown is commerated each year.

It was also formative for government forces, because many of the current military leaders were young at the time, Lund said. "When 2011 rolled around, they all realized that, you know, we all remember, you all remember Hama. So there's no there's no compromising here," he said.

In a video message Thursday, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the de facto leader of the Syrian insurgency, announced that fighters had reached Hama "to clean the wound that has bled for 40 years." One of the opposition fighters' first moves was to free prisoners from the city's central prison. Hama is a major intersection in Syria that links the country's center with the north as well as the east and the coast.

It is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Damascus, Assad's seat of power. Hama province also borders the coastal province of Latakia, a main base of popular support for Assad.

The region is predominantly Sunni Muslim but also has a minority from the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, to which Assad's family belongs.

Hama's fall would have been a massive development in its own right, Lund said. But coming after the fall of Syria's largest city, Aleppo last week, which gave government forces the time to prepare their defense lines, it "will absolutely encourage Assad's enemies and discourage his supporters." Next stop for the insurgents is the central province of Homs, which analysts say would be a game-changer if it falls into rebel hands. Insurgent groups have already said they are advancing toward Homs.

Homs, about 40kms south of Hama, is where one of Syria's two state-run oil refineries is located and is also gateway to Damascus. It connects the capital to the coast, where Assad has his base and his village of origin, and home to a Russian naval base.

"Should the rebels be able to seize Homs, which they now have a shot at doing after seizing Hama, then they could theoretically have grabbed" three of Syria's largest cities and severed the capital from the coast, said Lund. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AGENCIES

Iran claims successful space launch amid row

MANAMA, 6 DEC

Iran said Friday it conducted a successful space launch, the latest for its programme the West alleges improves Tehran's ballistic missile programme. Iran conducted the launch using its Simorgh programme, a satellite-carrying rocket that had seen a series of failed launches. The launch took place at Iran's Imam Khomeini Spaceport in rural Semnan province. There was no immediate independent confirmation the launch was successful. The announcement comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and as an uneasy ceasefire holds in Lebanon. *—PTI*

UnitedHealthcare's CEO's murder: New clues surface

NEW YORK, 6 DEC

New clues emerged in the hunt for the masked gunman who stalked and killed UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, including possible leads about his travel before the shooting and a message scrawled on ammunition found at the crime scene. The words "deny," "defend" and "depose" were found emblazoned on the ammunition, echoing a phrase used by insurance industry critics, two law enforcement officials said Thursday. Investigators also now believe the suspect may have travelled to New York last month on a bus that originated in Atlanta, one of the law enforcement officials said. Police and federal agents have been collecting information from Greyhound in an attempt to identify the suspect. *—PTI*

Communications failure disrupts Britain's rail travels

LONDON, 6 DEC

Rail travellers across Britain faced disruption Friday after a fault in a radio system used by drivers and signallers nationwide prompted cancellations across the network. The issue, occurred during the busy morning commute, has led to "short-notice" delays and cancellations throughout the UK, according to National Rail. Lines affected include the Elizabeth Line serving London's Heathrow Airport and the Gatwick Express to the capital's second-biggest airport. The fault mainly affects trains as they are preparing to leave the depot at the start of their journeys. "This is because it is preventing our drivers from contacting the respective signalling center and a reset is having to be performed before the train can start," South Western Railway reported. *—PTI*

Hong Kong's jailed activist loses early release appeal

HONG KONG, 6 DEC

A jailed Hong Kong activist lost his landmark legal challenge on Friday against the prison authorities' denial of early release under the new national security law. Ma Chun-man was serving a five-year term for inciting secession under a separate, Beijing-imposed national security law. He was convicted in 2021 for repeatedly advocating for Hong Kong's independence and had expected to be released early on 25 March. But he was not granted sentence remission after the new security law, introduced on 23 March raised the threshold for early release of those convicted of national security offenses. The new law stipulated that people found guilty must not be granted remission unless the commissioner of correctional services believes the move would not be a national security risk. *—PTI*

Syrian insurgents advance near 2 towns close to Homs

It follows the rebels' capture of Hama, Syria's 4th largest city

BEIRUT, 6 DEC

Syrian insurgents entered two central towns on early Friday just north of the central city of Homs, bringing them closer Syria's third largest city, an opposition war monitor and pro-government media both reported.

The break into Rastan and Talbiseh came a day after opposition gunmen captured the central city of Hama, Syria's fourth largest, after the Syrian army said it withdrew to avoid fighting inside the city and spare the lives of civilians.

The insurgents, led by the jihadi Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group (HTS) have said that they will march to Homs and Damascus, President Bashar Assad's seat of power.

Homs, parts of which were controlled by insurgents until 2014, is a major intersection point between the capital, Damascus, and Syria's coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartus where Assad enjoys wide support.

Syrian civil defence worker in a destroyed neighborhood after the Syrian government forces hit Idlib city, Syria PHOTO: PTI

Insurgents are now 5km away from Homs, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor. "The battle of Homs is the mother of all battles and will decide who will rule Syria," said Rami Abdurrahman, the Observatory's chief.

State news agency SANA quoted an unnamed military official as saying Friday that Syrian and Russian air force are attacking insurgents in Hama province, killing dozens of fighters. After the fall of Hama, opposition activists said that thousands of Homs residents who are loyal to Assad were seen fleeing toward Damascus and the coastal region.

Syria's Defence Minister said in a televised statement on late Thursday that the withdrawal of government forces from Hama was a tactical measure and vowed to gain back lost areas. Gen Ali Mahmoud Abbas said that the insurgents, whom he described as "takfiri" or Muslim extremists, are backed by foreign countries. He did not name the countries but appeared to be referring to Turkey, which is a main backer of the opposition, and the United States. The offensive is being led by HTS as well as an umbrella group of Turkish-backed Syrian militias called the Syrian National Army. Their sudden capture of the northern city of Aleppo, an ancient business hub, was a stunning prize for Assad's opponents and reignited the conflict which had been largely stalemated for the past few years. *—PTI*

SEEKS END TO WAR

Gaza truce talks resume after hiatus: Hamas

ISTANBUL, 6 DEC

A Hamas official said Thursday that international mediators have resumed negotiating with the militant group and Israel over a ceasefire in Gaza, and that he was hopeful a deal to end the 14-month war was within reach. Ceasefire negotiations were halted last month when Qatar suspended talks with mediators from Egypt and the United States because of frustration over a lack of progress between Israel and Hamas. But there has been a "reactivation" of efforts in recent days to end the fighting, release hostages from Gaza and free Palestinian prisoners in Israel, according to Bassem Naim, an official in Hamas' political bureau. Another official familiar with the talks confirmed the return of Qatari mediators.

Since the talks broke down, there have been significant shifts in the global and regional landscape. Donald Trump won the US presidential election, and a ceasefire was declared last week between Israel and Hamas ally Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Trump is a staunch supporter of Israel, but Naim said he believes the incoming administration could "affect the situation positively" given that Trump had made halting wars in the region part of his campaign platform. Trump this week called for the release of all hostages held in Gaza by the time he takes office on 20 January saying there would be "hell to pay" if that doesn't happen.

Basem Naim PHOTO: FB

- Hamas political official Khalil al-Hayya had previously told AP that if an independent Palestinian state were established along 1967 borders, the group would lay down its arms

Naim said that no "solid, well-formed" new ceasefire proposal has yet been presented to Hamas. And even though ceasefire talks have broken down on multiple occasions throughout the war, he added: "I think it is not a big challenge to reach a deal … if there are intentions on the other side." In an interview with British broadcaster Sky News on Wednesday, the Qatari prime minister said officials in his country are aiming to reach a ceasefire before president-elect Trump takes office.

Hamas political official Khalil al-Hayya had previously told AP that if an independent Palestinian state were established along 1967 borders, the group would lay down its arms.

Naim said that remains the group's position. *—PTI*

Trump names Perdue as ambassador to China

WASHINGTON DC, 6 DEC

US president-elect Donald Trump chose former Sen David Perdue of Georgia to be ambassador to China.

Trump said in a social media post that Perdue, a former CEO, "brings valuable expertise to help build our relationship with China." Perdue pushed Trump's debunked lies about electoral fraud during his failed bid for Georgia governor.

Perdue lost his Senate seat to Democrat Jon Ossoff four years ago and ran unsuccessfully in a primary against Georgia Gov Brian Kemp.

Trump said he would impose a 25 per cent tax on all products entering the country from Canada and Mexico, and an additional 10 per cent tariff on goods from China, as one of his first executive orders.

Biden considers pre-emptive pardons

President Joe Biden is weighing whether to issue sweeping pardons for officials and allies who the White House fears could be unjustly targeted by president-elect Donald

Trump's administration. Biden aides fear that Biden's use in this fashion could lay the groundwork for an even more drastic usage by Trump. *—PTI*

David Perdue PHOTO: WKIPEDIA

Chinese vessel fires water cannon on a Philippine bureau of fisheries vesel PHOTO: NATIONALTASKFORCEFORTHEWESTPHILIPPINESEA

US, Japan, Philippines patrol in South China Sea

MANILA/ TAIPEI, 6 DEC

The United States deployed a reconnaissance aircraft while Japan and the Philippines sent navy ships in a joint patrol in the disputed South China Sea on Friday, two days after the allied forces condemned actions by Chinese coast guard vessels against Philippine patrol ships.

The US Indo-Pacific Command said the joint patrol was conducted in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone by allies and partners to "uphold the right to freedom of navigation and overflight " and "other lawful uses of the sea and international airspace."

China claims the South China Sea virtually in its entirety and has guarded it assertively with its coast guard, navy and suspected militia fleets. They have confronted forces from rival claimant states including the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei.

Indonesia also has had faceoffs with Chinese coast guard ships escorting fishermen in the gas-rich Natuna waters in the southern fringes of the South China Sea.

Taiwan's leader calls on China to refrain from threats

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te called on China to "open its arms rather than raise its fists" as he wrapped up his first overseas tour since taking office in May. "No matter how many military exercises and warships and aircraft are used to coerce neighbouring countries, they will not be able to win the respect of any country," he said. He spoke a day after China's Foreign Ministry announced sanctions on 13 American companies and six executives in response to recently announced weapons sales to Taiwan. *—PTI*

Pak-Russia freight train trial to start in March: Minister

ISLAMABAD, 6 DEC

Russia and Pakistan are set to be linked by freight train line that will pass through Iran and Azerbaijan with the first trial run likely to take place in March next year, a Pakistan minister has said in an interview to Russia Today.

The development comes after Islamabad and Moscow signed eight memorandums of understanding (MoUs) covering various sectors, including health, trade, industrial cooperation, and education on Wednesday.

These agreements were reached during the meeting of the 9th Inter-Governmental Commission, which was established about a decade ago, at Moscow held from 2 to 4 December. Earlier, Pakistan's ambassador to Moscow, Muhammad Khalid Jamali, had expressed his country's readiness to join the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200 km-long route connecting Russia and Central Asia with India via Iran, at this summer's International IT Forum in Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia Today, a state-run news channel, said on Thursday. Islamabad's Energy Minister Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari told Russia Today: "As early as March next year, the first south-north train trial run will transport goods from Russia to Pakistan via Iran and Azerbaijan."

"It has both political and economic dimensions that Pakistan and Russia haven't seen for a while," Leghari asserted. *—PTI*

Lavrov says Russia will use 'all means' to defend its interests

MOSCOW, 6 DEC

Russia's top diplomat said in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson released Friday that Moscow doesn't want a war with the United States but will use "all means" to defend its interests.

Sergey Lavrov argued that while Russia and the US are officially not at war, Washington's permission for Ukraine to use American longer-range missiles for strikes on Russian territory marked a dangerous escalation.

Lavrov, the world's longest-serving foreign minister, said that a recent Russian strike on Ukraine with a new hypersonic intermediate range ballistic missile called Oreshnik was a signal to the West that Russia is prepared to use all means to achieve its goals in Ukraine.

"The United States, and the allies of the United States who also provide these long-range weapons to the Kiev regime, they must understand that we would be ready to use any means not to allow them to succeed in what they call strategic defeat of Russia."

Russian President Vladimir Putin has described the 21 November attack with Oreshnik as a response to Ukrainian strikes on Russian military facilities in Bryansk and Kursk regions with Western-supplied weapons.

Putin visited Belarus on Friday to sign a treaty offering security guarantees to Moscow's closest ally.

The planned signing of the document follows the publication of a revised version of Russia's nuclear doctrine, which for the first time placed Belarus under the Russian nuclear umbrella amid the tensions between Moscow and the West over the Ukrainian conflict. *—PTI*

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the plenary sesionof the 31st Organizaton for security and cooperation in Europe PHOTO: PTI

Canada to donate guns to Ukraine

Ottawa, 6 Dec

Canada said on Friday that it is outlawing another 324 firearm varieties — guns the public safety minister said belong on the battlefield, not in the hands of hunters or sport shooters. Ottawa also said it is working with the government of Ukraine to see how the guns can be donated to support the fight against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *—PTI*

CURBING RIGHTS

Russian LGBTQ+ live in fear amid new laws

TALLINN, 6 DEC

In the year since Russia's Supreme Court effectively outlawed any promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, activists say they are experiencing a climate of fear and intimidation in the country.

LGBTQ+ rights have been under legal and public pressure for over a decade under President Vladimir Putin, but especially since the Kremlin launched its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Putin has argued the war is a proxy battle with the West, which he says aims to destroy Russia and its "traditional family values."

Putin insists Russia doesn't discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, but he also decries "perversions that lead to degradation and extinction." Parliament speaker Vyacheslav Volodin last year called gender transitioning "pure satanism" that should stay in the US. Any public representation of gay and transgender people is banned. Gender-affirming medical care and changing one's gender in official documents is prohibited. With the Supreme Court's ruling in November 2023 that found "the international LGBT movement" to be extremist, members of the LGBTQ+ community can be prosecuted and imprisoned for up to six years. As a result, many people like Gela Gogishvili and Haoyang Xu have fled Russia.

Russia's LGBTQ+ community is living in fear following new laws and court rulings. PHOTO: X@PETERSANYAONE

They lived a happy life in the republic of Tatarstan, where Gogishvili was a pharmacist and Xu was a student from China.

They were detained after the Kremlin in December 2022 expanded its ban of "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" from minors to adults, effectively outlawing any public endorsement of LGBTQ+ activities. *—PTI*

S Korea's ruling party Chief urges Yoon's sacking

SEOUL, 6 DEC

The head of South Korea's governing party has called for the swift suspension of President Yoon Suk-yeol's powers, citing "credible evidence" that he sought the arrest of political leaders following his short-lived declaration of martial law.

People Power Party (PPP) leader Han Dong-hoon, who had earlier said he would oppose efforts to impeach Yoon, said on Friday that "newly emerging facts" had tipped the scales against him.

In a closed-door briefing to the chair of the National Assembly's intelligence committee on Friday, a top official with the South Korean spy agency said Yoon had demanded the arrest of several high-profile legislators, including Han and Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myun, state-funded Yonhap News Agency reported.

South Korea was placed under martial law for about six hours on Tuesday night after Yoon announced the move in a surprise televised address to the nation in which he cited threats from "anti-state forces" and North Korean sympathisers.

The National Assembly quickly mobilised to overturn Yoon's order, which evoked painful memories of dictatorial rule under Presidents Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, in a 190-0 vote. As well as facing impeachment, Yoon is currently under investigation for treason alongside resigned Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun, Army Chief of Staff General Park An-su and Interior Minister Lee Sang-min. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold trades flat at ₹79,150 per 10g; silver slips by ₹300

NEW DELHI , 6 DEC

Gold prices traded flat at Rs 79,150 per 10g in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. However, silver declined Rs 300 to Rs 93,500 per kg. The white metal closed higher at Rs 93,800 per kg on Thursday. Price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity also remained flat at Rs 78,750 per 10g on Friday. In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 181, or 0.24 per cent, to trade at Rs 76,657 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for March delivery climbed Rs 426, or 0.46 per cent, to quote at Rs 92,850 per kg. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 1P to 84.70 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

The rupee settled on a flat note and appreciated by just 1 paisa to close at 84.70 (provisional) against US dollar on Friday, as the Reserve Bank of India left repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent in its monetary policy decision. Reserve Bank of India on Friday kept its key interest rate unchanged citing inflation risks, but cut the Cash Reserve Ratio that banks are required to park with the central bank, boosting money with lenders to support a slowing economy. Forex traders said an overall decline in the US dollar and crude oil prices supported the rupee. However, weak domestic markets capped sharp gains. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.66 and touched an intraday high of 84.53 and a low of 84.70 against the greenback. On Thursday, the rupee recovered from its all-time low level and settled for the day with gains of 4 paise at 84.71 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Maruti mulls 4% prices hike from Jan

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Maruti Suzuki India on Friday said it will hike prices of its model range by up to four per cent from January in light of rising input costs, adverse exchange rate and increase in logistics costs. The auto major said in a regulatory filing that the price increase will vary depending on the model. "While the company continuously strives to optimise costs and minimise the impact on its customers, some portion of the increased cost may need to be passed on to the market," it said. Maruti Suzuki sells a range of models, ranging from Alto hatchback to Invicto multi-utility vehicles, in the domestic market. Hyundai Motor India, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi have also announced price hike from 1 January. *—PTI*

Sai Life Sciences IPO to open on 11 December

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

Private equity major TPG Capital-backed Sai Life Sciences on Friday said it has fixed a price band of Rs 522–549 per equity share for its Rs 3,043 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) that opens for public subscription on 11 December. The bidding for the anchor portion will open for a day on 10 December and the initial share sale will conclude on 13 December, the company announced. The IPO comprises fresh equity shares worth Rs 950 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 3.81 crore equity shares by promoter, investor shareholders and other shareholders, revealed the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). Under the OFS, TPG Asia VII SF Pte Ltd and HBM Private Equity India will offload their respective stakes. *—PTI*

RBI hikes rate limits to woo FCNR(B) deposits

Cap on collateral-free agriculture loan raised to ₹2 lakh

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday announced a raise in the interest rate caps on the Foreign Currency Non-Resident Bank deposits or FCNR (B) deposits as per tenors – a move aimed at attracting more capital flows amid pressures on the rupee.

Announcing the fifth bi-monthly monetary policy for the current financial year, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said that from Friday, banks can to raise fresh FCNR (B) deposits of one to three years at rates not exceeding Overnight Alternative Reference Rate (ARR) plus 400 basis points, as against 250 basis points earlier.

Similarly, deposits for three to five years can be paid an interest of ARR plus 500 basis points, as against the 350 basis points ceiling earlier, Das said, adding that the relaxation will be available only till March 31 next year.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said it has been decided to increase the interest rate ceilings on FCNR (B) deposits as per tenors *PHOTO: X*

- SFBs leverage a high-tech, low-cost model to reach the last-mile customer and can help expand the reach of credit on UPI, Das said.

Farm loan cap revised

The RBI has also enhanced the collateral-free agriculture loans limit to Rs 2 lakh per borrower from the existing Rs 1.6 lakh in view of inflation and rise in farm input costs. This limit was enhanced from the Rs 1 lakh set in 2010 to Rs 1.6 lakh in 2019.

"Taking into account the rise in agricultural input costs and overall inflation, the limit for collateral-free agriculture loans has been increased from Rs 1.6 lakh to Rs 2 lakh per borrower," the RBI governor said.

Axe on mule accounts

The apex bank has also asked banks to collaborate with its initiative MuleHunter.AI to weed out mule accounts which are used to commit financial fraud. "Use of money mule accounts is a common method adopted by fraudsters to channel proceeds of frauds," Das said.

Nod to credit on UPI

The RBI also proposed to allow small finance banks (SFBs) to extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Credit line on UPI has the potential to make available low-ticket, low-tenor products to "new-to-credit" customers, Das said.

SFBs leverage a high-tech, low-cost model to reach the last-mile customer and can help expand the reach of credit on UPI, he said. "It is, therefore, proposed to permit SFBs to extend pre-sanctioned credit lines through the UPI," he said. *—PTI*

SENSEX FALLS 56 PTS

Mkt snap 5-day bull run as RBI cuts FY25 forecast

MUMBAI, 6 DEC

Snapping the five-day winning run, benchmark Sensex dropped by 56 points in a highly volatile trade on Friday after Reserve Bank cut the growth projection for 2024-25 and kept the policy rates unchanged.

After oscillating between highs and lows during the day, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 56.74 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 81,709.12. Intra-day, it swung 419.72 points, hitting a high of 81,925.91 and a low of 81,506.19.

In the past five trading days, the BSE benchmark jumped 2,722.12 points or 3.44 per cent.

The NSE Nifty dipped 30.60 points or 0.12 per cent to settle at 24,677.80.

From the 30-share pack, Adani Port, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Reliance Industries, Infosys, UltraTech Cement, HDFC Bank, HCL Technologies and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

Tata Motors, Axis Bank, Maruti, Larsen & Toubro, ITC and Tata Steel were among the gainers. "Markets had been rising for the past five trading sessions and hence a small breather was expected. With RBI springing no major surprise in its credit policy announcement, investors booked profit in select frontlines.

PHOTO: PTI

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 8,539.91 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE small-cap gauge climbed 0.60 per cent and midcap index shot up by 0.36 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, metal jumped 1.17 per cent, consumer durables (1.16 per cent), auto (0.92 per cent), services (0.82 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.63 per cent).

Teck, BSE Focused IT and IT were the laggards. *—PTI*

4 Adani bonds get JP Morgan nod

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

US investment banker JP Morgan has given "overweight" rating on four Adani group bonds, comforted by ability to scale and grow using internal cash flows, which reduces the scope for credit stress.

In a report, JP Morgan gave "overweight" rating on three bond issues of Adani Ports & SEZ and one by Adani Electricity Mumbai Ltd (a subsidiary of Adani Energy Solutions Ltd). It has taken neutral stand on other five Adani bonds and is underweight on one bond issued by Adani Green Energy Ltd.

JP Morgan gives three kinds of ratings for bonds – "overweight" rating which falls into a buy rating category, "neutral" rating which falls into a hold rating category and "underweight" rating which falls into a sell rating category.

The report said that under the risks section, Adani bonds could do better than anticipated if there is a quick resolution of the US SEC and Department of Justice indictments of founder chairman Gautam Adani and key aides on bribery charges, successful refinancing of the upcoming bonds and credit facilities and improved operating performance.

PHOTO: X

- After initial volatility, spreads of the group's bonds seem to have settled, widening by about 100-200 basis points, with short tenor seeing more spread widening due to higher dollar prices, it said.

Adani group has denied as baseless the charges brought against it by the US authorities.

After initial volatility, "spreads of the group's bonds, (since action by US authorities), seem to have settled, widening by about 100-200 basis points, with short tenor seeing more spread widening due to higher dollar prices," JP Morgan said. It said the bonds may not be backed by any security, but are backed by solid cash flows. "Our preference is for cash flows over security." *—PTI*

DOWN BY 29 TONNES

Gold ETFs report net loss after six months

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The November month saw global physically backed gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) record net outflows of USD 2.1 billion, marking the first decline in six months. According to the World Gold Council, this represents the largest single-month outflow since April, leading to a 4 per cent drop in total assets under management (AUM) to USD 274 billion. Total holdings decreased by 29 tonnes to 3,215 tonnes, indicating waning investor interest amidst declining gold prices.

Despite the losses in November, year-to-date inflows into global gold ETFs remain positive at USD 2.6 billion, driven largely by Asia and North America. However, Europe continues to struggle, reporting consistent outflows throughout the year, with November seeing losses of USD 1.9 billion across all major markets.

PHOTO: PTI

Asia experienced a notable outflow of USD 145 million in November, primarily driven by a decline in China. In contrast, India attracted USD 175 million in inflows for the eighth consecutive month, amid rising equity market volatility.

North America recorded its fifth consecutive month of inflows, adding USD 79 million, buoyed by expectations of a weaker dollar and geopolitical uncertainties.

Global gold trading activity surged for the third consecutive month, with an 8 per cent rise in average daily trading volume to USD 290 billion. *—ANI*

Govt to mandate hallmarking for gold bullion

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

The Indian government is exploring a proposal to mandate the hallmarking of gold bullion, alongside drafting regulations for lab-grown diamonds, as part of its initiative to protect consumer interests, Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare announced.

Speaking at the CII Gems and Jewellery Conference, Khare underscored the importance of safeguarding consumer interests by ensuring the authenticity and quality of products. She noted the sector is a vital component of the economy, significantly contributing to exports and employment.

Khare highlighted the successful implementation of mandatory hallmarking for gold jewellery and artefacts, which began on 23 June 2021, leading to over 400 million items being hallmarked with a unique HUID, fostering greater confidence and transparency among consumers. *—PTI*

US judge bins Boeing's plea deal in crash case

DALLAS, 6 DEC

A federal judge in Texas has rejected a plea agreement that would have allowed Boeing to plead guilty to a felony conspiracy charge related to misleading US regulators about the 737 Max jetliner, which was involved in two fatal crashes that killed 346 people. US District Judge Reed O'Connor's decision raises doubts about the criminal prosecution of the aerospace giant.

O'Connor expressed concerns that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives could influence the selection of an independent monitor to oversee Boeing's compliance under the deal. He insisted that the appointment should focus solely on competency, without racial considerations, highlighting the need for public confidence in the oversight process.

The plea deal, reached in July, would have let Boeing plead guilty to defrauding regulators who approved pilot-training requirements. The judge noted the agreement's provision allowing Boeing to veto candidates for the monitor role, further undermining judicial authority. Paul Cassell, attorney for victims' families, hailed the decision as a win for crime victims' rights, criticising the previous deal as a "cozy" arrangement that lacked accountability for Boeing. Boeing's lawyers are expected to push back against claims of violation of a previous settlement, as the judge acknowledged uncertainty regarding the alleged breach. *—PTI*

India's no to RCEP pact is firm: Goyal

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

India in 2019 decided not to join the mega free trade agreement RCEP because the pact was not addressing its concerns and since then, there has been no change in that position, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement is being negotiated among 10 ASEAN members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and their six free-trade pact partners Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.

In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Goyal said India decided not to join RCEP in its current form because its structure did not adequately address the ambitions and concerns of the country's stakeholders.

During the third RCEP Leaders Summit held in Bangkok on 4 November, 2019, India conveyed its position, he said. "There has been no change in India's position since then," Goyal said.

Goyal also said that India's imports from China have jumped to USD 101.74B in 2023–24 from USD 70.32B in 2018–19. However, exports dipped to USD 16.66B in the last fiscal from USD 16.75 billion in 2018–19. "Most of the goods imported from China are capital goods, intermediate goods and raw materials and are used for meeting the demand of fast-expanding sectors like electronics, telecom and power in India, he said. *—PTI*

> **Most of the goods imported from China are capital goods, intermediate goods and raw materials and are used for meeting the demand of fast-expanding sectors like electronics, telecom and power in India**
>
> -Piyush Goyal, Commerce and Industry Minister

Piyush Goyal *PHOTO: PTI*

IMPORTS, EXPORTS DIP

Sanctions & reduced demand hit diamond mkt

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

India's diamond industry has faced significant challenges over the past three years due to a decrease in demand from key export markets and supply-side issues, notably G7 sanctions on Russian-origin diamonds.

In a written statement to the Rajya Sabha, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal revealed that diamond exports for the fiscal year 2023-24 plummeted to USD 18.37 billion, a stark decline from USD 25.48 billion in 2021-22. Similarly, imports fell to USD 23 billion compared to USD 28.86 billion in the previous fiscal year.

Minister Goyal acknowledged the ongoing difficulties, attributing the slowdown in cut and polished diamond exports to weak demand. He noted that the Department of Commerce, in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC), is actively working to explore new markets and product lines while aiming to sustain existing major markets to bolster India's position in the gems and jewellery sector.

The diamond sector provides direct employment to approximately 1.3 million workers *PHOTO: PTI*

The Indian diamond industry comprises over 7,000 companies focused on various activities, including cutting, polishing, and exporting diamonds. Most of these firms are located in Surat, Gujarat, and Mumbai, Maharashtra, with a predominance of small and medium enterprises, many of which are family-owned.

The sector provides direct employment to approximately 1.3 million workers, with Surat alone accounting for around 800,000 jobs, making it the world's largest hub for diamond cutting and polishing. Moreover, the industry supports millions of indirect jobs across related sectors such as logistics, transport, retail, and diamond tool manufacturing. *—PTI*

AI delays Kolkata to Dhaka flight amid expansion

KOLKATA, 6 DEC

Air India Express, the low-cost arm of Air India, is set to significantly expand its fleet and introduce new routes, driven by robust passenger growth. However, plans for direct flights between Kolkata and Dhaka have been postponed due to the ongoing political situation in Bangladesh. Aloke Singh, Managing Director of Air India Express, confirmed the deferment, stating that services to Dhaka, initially planned for September with six weekly flights, will resume once conditions improve.

Despite this delay, Singh reiterated the airline's commitment to growth in the eastern sector, highlighting upcoming international services to Kathmandu starting in March 2025. The airline intends to increase its fleet from 90 to over 100 aircraft by March 2025, projecting a long-term goal of approximately 175 aircraft within three years.

PHOTO: ANI

Air India Express currently operates 24 daily flights from Kolkata, with an expected increase of ten flights in the summer schedule. Singh also announced a focus on enhancing connectivity in the northeast and expansion into Southeast Asia, with potential new routes to Bangkok, Singapore, Vietnam, and Colombo under consideration. The airline holds a 12 percent market share in Kolkata, rising to 24 percent including parent company Air India. *—PTI*

India bags six medals at World Pickleball C'ship

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

India produced a stellar performance at the Hong Kong leg of the World Pickleball Championship, securing six medals, including one gold, three silvers, and two bronze. The duo of Vanshik Kapadia and Vrushali Thakare clinched the gold medal in the 19+ open mixed doubles category in the 29 November -1 December meeting. Kuldip Mahajan won a silver partnering South Korea's Kim Eung Gwon in the 19+ open mixed doubles. Vanshik Kapadia (19+ open men's singles), Karina Aditya Dwipayani, and Vrushali Thakare (19+ open women's doubles) were the other two silver-medallists. The Indian contingent also brought home two bronze medals, with Isha Lakhani and Roos Van Reek finishing on the podium in the 19+ open women's doubles category.Mayur Patil teamed up with Neilson Chen in the 19+ open mixed doubles for India's second bronze.—*PTI*

India go down fighting against Japan, miss semis

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

India struck 15 goals against Japan but that proved insufficient as the former champions won 48-15 to advance to the semi-finals of the Asian Women's Handball Championship here on Thursday.India will now face Singapore in the 5-8th place classification on Sunday, with the winners to play either China or Hong Kong to determine their final standings.In the semifinals, South Korea will face Iran, while Kazakhstan play Japan on Sunday.Maninder Kaur scored India's first goal after a battling start, while goalkeeper Nina Shil carried her form over from the previous match to thwart Japan's early attacks.As the game progressed, India moved the ball from side to side, attempting to fashion an opening through the sturdy Japan defense, but the heavyweights were too strong and quickly built a considerable lead over the hosts.Sushma also scored a long-range goal and moments later, Bhawana Sharma intercepted a Japanese attack, ran through on goal, and finished with aplomb.—*PTI*

Young leads at Hero World Challenge on Day 1

ALBANY, 6 DEC

Cameron Young surprised the fancied names in the field to grab the sole lead with an impressive bogey-free eight-under 64 in the first round of the Hero World Challenge here. Young, who is the only golfer yet to win on the PGA Tour, touched 12 of 13 fairways and 16 of 18 greens with 28 putts to dominate the field on Thursday.The 27-year-old fired eight birdies on the day, joint highest with Nick Dunlop, who slipped to tied eighth with a four-under after making a strong beginning.—*PTI*

Leon set for sale because of FIFA's ownership rules

MEXICO CITY, 6 DEC

Mexican club Leon is set to be put up for sale to comply with Club World Cup regulations that prohibit multi-club ownership, but it won't happen in the short term. The decision was announced Thursday by the owner of Grupo Pachuca, Jesús Martínez, who hopes that FIFA will take the pending sale into account and let both teams participate in the expanded Club World Cup next year in the United States. Grupo Pachuca owns Leon and Pachuca, and both clubs qualified for the 32-team tournament. Martínez said he's spoken to FIFA and plans to meet with the president of CONCACAF, Victor Montagliani, to explain how the two teams operate. "They are listening. We have been transparent and we are optimistic that we can move forward.—*PTI*

Mitchell's 6-wicket haul helps Australia dominate

Bumrah was once again the best Indian bowler on show

ADELAIDE, 6 DEC

Seasoned pacer Mitchell Starc made the most of a moving pink ball for a career-best six-wicket haul as India flattered to deceive to let Australia hold all the aces on day one of the day-night Test here on Friday.

Opting to bat, India had it under control at 69 for one before they lost their way to settle for 180 all out at the stroke of dinner.A fearless Nitish Reddy (42 off 54) was the sole man responsible for taking his team past the 150-run mark, adding valuable runs with the lower order.Australia did well to reach 86 for one at stumps with Marnus Labuschagne (20 batting off 67) and Nathan McSweeney (38 batting off 97) finding welcome runs.

The conditions remained challenging for the batters through the day but the pitch had enough runs for the taking.

The hosts would be backing themselves to surpass India's total on day two, considering the easier batting conditions in daylight.Labuschagne, fighting for his place in the side, once again took a long time, 19 balls to be specific, to get off the mark but then found ways to score runs.

McSweeney was dropped by Rishabh Pant early in his innings and he rode that luck to frustrate the opposition. Birthday boy Jasprit Bumrah was once again the best Indian bowler on show and picked up the only wicket to fall in Australia's innings, having Usman Khawaja caught at first slip with a beauty.

The Indian pace spearhead will need more support from fellow fast bowlers on Saturday. Starc sizzled with his trademark inswingers to remove R Ashwin and Harshit Rana while Cummins used the short ball effectively.

Rohit Sharma (3 off 23), batting in the middle order after six years, was trapped in front by Boland with a ball that jagged back from length.Pant (21 off 35) played his trademark aggressive game before falling to a sharp bouncer from Cummins.

Nitish Reddy *PHOTO: PTI*

Reddy, who impressed on his debut in Perth, added much-needed runs to the total alongside number eight Ashwin (22 off 22), who replaced Washington Sundar in the playing eleven.

Australia 86 for 1 (McSweeney 38*, Labuschagne 20*, Bumrah1-13) trail India 180 (Reddy 42, Rahul 37 Starc 6-48, Cummins 2-41) by 94 runs. —*PTI*

ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND

Brook's century has England on top after Day 1

WELLINGTON, 6 DEC

Harry Brook played the role of New Zealand's nemesis with flair on Friday, reaching his eighth test century as England finished in a strong position after the first day of the second test.

Brook's fast-paced innings of 123 included a century from 91 balls and set the tempo of a day on which 346 runs were scored and 15 wickets fell.

New Zealand finished in trouble at 86-5 in reply to England's 280, having lost Devon Conway, Tom Latham, Rachin Ravindar, Kane Williamson, and Daryl Mitchell before stumps. Tom Blundell was 6 not out and nightwatchman Will O'Rourke was unbeaten on 0.

Williamson appeared typically solid until he was caught by wicketkeeper Ollie Pope from the bowling of Brydon Carse for 37. Carse had bowled Williamson when he was 20 only to be denied when replays showed he had overstepped.

Brook made the difference in the first test which England won by eight wickets, going to the crease at 45-3 and making 171 to deliver a commanding first-innings lead. England was 259-7 when Brook was out and, gradually losing momentum after his departure, was finally all out in 53.4 overs. —*PTI*

Kho Kho WC: India to conduct training

NEW DELHI, 6 DEC

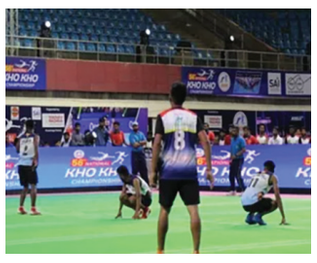


PHOTO: PTI

India will organise a training camp in preparation for the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup with 60 male and as many female players battling it out to break into the teams that will represent the host nation in the tournament.

The Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI), in collaboration with the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Sports Ministry, will conduct the camp at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium from 10 December to 11 January.

India is set to host the event from 13 to 19 January.

''We are thrilled to bring the Kho Kho World Cup to Indian soil,'' Sudhanshu Mittal, KKFI president, said in a release.

''This training camp presents a golden opportunity for players to prove their mettle and be part of a truly historic moment. With a keen eye on talent, our dedicated coaches will help shape the squad for this global event.'' Players from across the country will gather in the national capital on December 9, and the final squads for the World Cup will be selected based on their performance during the training camp.

The training program will integrate cutting-edge sports science technologies to optimise player performance and health, including the InBody 770 Body Composition Analyzer, Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis (BIA) techniques, and Whole Body EMS (Electrical Muscle Stimulation) training. —*PTI*

Sri Lanka's Shammi Silva *PHOTO: TWITTER*

Shammi Silva takes over ACC presidency role

DUBAI, 6 DEC

Sri Lanka's Shammi Silva has taken over as the president of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), succeeding India's Jay Shah, who recently became the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Shah had vacated the position after three terms as ACC President.

It won't be Silva's maiden role with the ACC, having previously functioned as the chairman of the organization's Finance & Marketing Committee. —*PTI*

CHESS WORLD C'SHIP

Gukesh, Liren eye breakthrough after series of draws

SINGAPORE, 6 DEC

D Gukesh and Ding Liren in action *PHOTO: X*

Half a dozen draws and some missed opportunities later, sprightly challenger D Gukesh and resolute defending champion Ding Liren would be desperate for a breakthrough when they clash in the 10th game of the World Chess Championship here on Saturday.

Gukesh has explored several winning lines but the advantage has not translated into victories for the Indian, and with just five more classical games left to be played in the USD 2.5 million prize money championship, the 18-year-old would look to break the deadlock and hope to take a decisive lead after a day's rest on Friday. The draw on Thursday, which was the seventh of the match and sixth on the trot, has left both players on an identical score of 4.5 points each, still three shy of the championship-winning tally.

The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game while Gukesh had emerged victorious in the third All other games have ended in draws. If history is anything to go by, the reigning champion wins the match if the scores are tied 4-4 after eight games which was the case here too.

The Chennai-born Indian knows that he will have to punch hard against his gritty Chinese opponent, who has a habit of coming up with well-disguised tricks when the chips are down. World number one and five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen minced no words while doing a recap of the ninth game and said that the time was running out for Gukesh. —*PTI*

Messi beats out Hernandez for 2024 honor *PHOTO: @WEAREMESSI*

Messi wins MLS MVP award

FORT LAUDERDALE, 6 DEC

It was a rare instance of Lionel Messi stepping on a soccer field and having no idea what was happening. There they were, more than 250 Inter Miami academy players, a slew of kids lined up at midfield in a formation that spelled out three letters: MVP.

And when Messi saw his children, he realized they were holding a trophy.That's how Messi learned he was Major League Soccer's best player in 2024.Messi is the MLS MVP, even after a season where he missed 15 of Inter Miami's 34 regular-season matches with injuries or commitments to Argentina's national team.He factored into a league-high 36 goals scoring 20, assisting on 16 others for the highest rate per 90 minutes in MLS history."Truly, it is an honor for me to receive this award from all of you," Messi told the academy players.MLS revealed the voting results Friday. Messi edged out Columbus Crew forward Cucho Hernández for the award, which is determined by a poll of players —*PTI*

Messi and Inter to open Club WC against Egyptian club

LONDON, 6 DEC

The host team invited by FIFA to compete despite criticism from many in the soccer world will play the tournament's first match on 15 June against Egyptian club Al Ahly, as part of a group that will also feature Palmeiras and Porto. And Messi's team, as a representative of the host nation, gets the distinction of playing the first match. It'll happen at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Other opening matches include Paris Saint-Germain vs. Atletico Madrid and Brazilian club Botafogo playing at Major League Soccer's Seattle Sounders in Group B; Monterrey against Inter Milan in Group E; and Real Madrid facing the Saudi club Al-Hilal potentially a showdown pitting superstars Mbappé for Real Madrid and Neymar for Al-Hilal if the Brazilian great remains with that club. —*PTI*

KARNATAKA TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION (R)
THIS PRESTIGIOUS CHAMPIONSHIP RETURNS TO BENGALURU AFTER 12 YEARS, BRINGING TOGETHER THE BEST TALENTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE EVENT
DATE: DECEMBER 15 - DECEMBER 22, 2024
VENUE: KANTEERAVA INDOOR STADIUM, BENGALURU
JOIN US FOR INDIA'S

MS Ramaiah family's Raksha Ramaiah and Karnataka Table Tennis Association members address reporters on Table Tennis Tournament, which is from 15 to 22 December at Kanteerava Indoor Stadium, Bengaluru *PHOTO: PTI*

Nagal to play 5th Grand Slam

MELBOURNE, 6 DEC

Indian tennis star Sumit Nagal is set for his fifth appearance in a Grand Slam after earning a direct entry for the main draw of next year's Australian Open.

The 98th-ranked Nagal, who features in the entry list released by Tennis Australia on Friday, had to go through the qualifying rounds in the competition's previous edition.

In the first round, Nagal had stunned the 31st seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan in straight sets to record a win by 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (5), becoming the first Indian player to beat a seeded player in the main draw in singles at Grand Slam in 34 years. However, Nagal's journey ended in the following round with a defeat to wild-card Shang Juncheng of China. —*PTI*

Napoli knocked out of Italian Cup

PARIS, 6 DEC

Napoli were knocked out of the Italian Cup by Lazio on Thursday after Tijjani Noslin fired a hat-trick to hand the Serie A leaders a 3-1 last-16 defeat in Rome.

Lazio will face either Inter Milan or Udinese in the quarter-finals thanks to Dutch attacker Noslin's treble which took his season's goal tally to five.

League champions Inter host Udinese at the San Siro in two weeks. Noslin nodded Lazio ahead in the 32nd minute and, following Giovanni Simeone's rapid leveler, ended a sweeping move with a brilliant dummy and finish to put the hosts back into the lead four minutes before half-time.

And the 25-year-old made sure of Lazio's passage to the last eight in four minutes after the break with another header from a pinpoint cross from Mattia Zaccagni, who also had a penalty saved midway through the first half. —*PTI*

FORMULA 1

Chinese Grand Prix to stay in F1 until 2030

ABU DHABI, 6 DEC

The Chinese Grand Prix will stay on the Formula 1 calendar until at least 2030 in a contract extension announced Friday. The deal was struck even though F1's first Chinese driver, Zhou Guanyu, is without a race seat next year.

F1's previous contract to race at the Shanghai International Circuit, signed in 2021, had been due to run out next year. In a statement announcing the extension, F1 claimed a "fanbase" of 150 million people in China and said most had started to follow F1 in the last four years.

Shanghai hosts the second round of the 2025 season from March 21 through 23, including a sprint race.

Zhou became the first Chinese driver in F1 with what was then known as the Alfa Romeo team in 2022. Now in his third season with the team, which now competes as Sauber, he is without a place on the grid next year.

Zhou didn't race in China until this year because races in Shanghai were repeatedly canceled amid the COVID-19 pandemic. —*PTI*

VERSTAPPEN'S FEUD WITH RUSSELL IN F1

ABU DHABI, 6 DEC

Two of Formula 1's top drivers exchange bitter personal attacks. All-time great Lewis Hamilton is bidding an emotional farewell to Mercedes. And by the way, the constructor's title is still on the line.

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix is loaded with drama at the end of a 24-race F1 season. Despite Max Verstappen wrapping up his fourth driver title in Las Vegas two weeks ago, the Red Bull star is still the centre of attention for a feud with George Russell of Mercedes.

Russell branded Verstappen "a bully" and accused him of threatening behaviour following a dispute between the two in qualifying at the Qatar Grand Prix last week.

Max Verstappen to become a father

Formula 1 champion Max Verstappen is set to become a father for the first time with his girlfriend Kelly Piquet, he said Friday. There's racing heritage on both sides of the family.—*PTI*

Kyrgios enters the AO for his first Grand Slam tournament

MELBOURNE, 6 DEC

Former Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios has entered the Australian Open, which would mark his first Grand Slam tournament in more than two years. Australian Open organizers announced entry lists for the tournament on Friday and said that Krygios had entered with a protected ranking, having been mostly sidelined with wrist and knee injuries since reaching the quarterfinals of the 2022 U.S. Open.

Kyrgios recently announced he will make his return at the Brisbane International beginning Dec. 29 after playing only one ATP Tour match in more than two years.

Tokyo Olympics gold medallist Belinda Bencic has also entered the Jan. 12-26 Australian Open with a protected ranking as she returns from maternity leave. Her daughter, Bella, was born in April.

Another prominent player entered with a protected ranking is former No. 4 Kei Nishikori, who will return to the Australian Open for the first time since 2021. —*PTI*